The Sound Projector Music Magazine 15th Issue 2007

The SOUND Projector

15

U W OWL

Davenport Family

CLAY RUBY

SONIC CATERING BAND

MUDBOY

THE SB

WATERSPORTS

Russ Waterhouse

BLACK METAL
US UNDERGROUND
ART MUSIC
ELECTRONICA
NOISE
ENVIRONMENT
DRONES
QUIET MUSIC
GUITARS
SONGS
IMPROVISATION
FREAKDOM
TAPEWORK
WORLD MUSIC
ROCK

2007

★ Carl Michael Von Hausswolff
★ Music from the NORDIC REALMS
★ The Devil and Daniel Johnston

THE MAGAZINE OF FORBIDDEN MUSICAL KNOWLEDGE!

The Sound Projector 15th Issue

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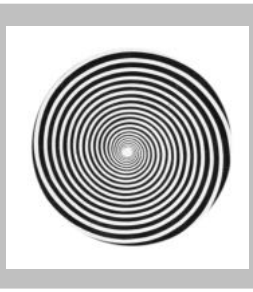

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HANDS FROM JAGGED TRUNK

Ed Pinsent 2005

THE NORDIC REALMS

Music from Finland, Norway and Denmark

Tivol

Interstellar Overbike

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 079 CD (2006)

A mighty blast of roaring rockage from this Finnish guitar-bass-drums trio, recorded in 2004. Not clear where this stands in relation to *Early Teeth*, their LP release on Holy Mountain, but it's by far superior to that rather flat record. A short half-hour wallop of solid rocking vibes sustained across three tracks, filled with steady and energised thumping, riffing, and guitar-abuse. No excessive guitar solos in sight, just tuneful thrashing about in a single key, sometimes given additional 'structure' by inclusion of meaningless and portentous lyrics at start and end of piece, dispensed with quickly, and delivered in an extremely odd semi-operatic vocal manner. Not a few psych and 1970s rock influences; the jokey title admits to everything, although you never heard the Floyd rock as freely as this, and the insane cover art tips a nod to Blue Öyster Cult with its depiction of Hell's Angels bikers rendered as Viking warriors, in an extremely bad art style. The other edge this band has is the occasional use of weird effects, applied onto a song at key moments to throw you off-balance; I mean the vague distortion, use of wah-wah, unexpected volume fades and other odd treatments that somehow slip a song into 'dream sequence' mode, or evoke a bad acid flashback. Gear-shifting through overdubs; the only band I can think of who frequently do similar things are fellow Finns Pharaoh Overlord. Tivol seem to be finding their identity with this convincing foray.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

Keuhkot

Toimintatapoja Olioille

FINLAND EKTRO RECORDS EKTRO-034 CD (2005)

Oddball eccentric in a land whose current musical reputation is pretty much built on the

efforts of oddball eccentric musicians, Keuhkot is one guy, Kake Puhuu, working in his home studio near a remote town somewhere in Finland and churning out deliberately flat-footed and kooky sonic art on an amazing array of instruments: electronics, guitars, drums, flutes, samples, dog food (dog food?!) and a rusty-sounding fiddle known to Bedouin Arabs as a kamngia or kamanjah. At once neo-primitive yet really quite sophisticated in the way exotic acoustic instruments blend into the cheap lumpen electronics and guitar riffs, and apparently out to offend all or most known musical proprieties yet in its own way socially and politically aware (it's unfortunate though that the lyrics are not translated into English in the CD booklet), the music never ceases to surprise. Initially it's not easy to listen to and repeated hearings are necessary in order to appreciate Puhuu's skill as a musician and arranger and the weird hulking melodies defy understanding. Puhuu's style of singing hardly endears itself to refined musical sensibilities: it's very caveman-like, declamatory and boorish yet urgent and full of feeling. Imagine a crazed hermit figure covered in long matted hair coming down a mountain with stone tablets in his arms and yelling out in a hoarse deep voice that the end of the world is nigh unless we all repent and worship his deity, and you have a bit of an idea as to what Puhuu is like to hear.

No filler material is to be found here: nearly every track is strange and wacky in a way Keuhkot's fellow lounge electronica Finns Aavikko strive to be. For Puhuu, being eccentric and outsider is the normal state, musically at least. However one highlight of this CD is the unusually quiet and not-at-all strange 'Hiljainen hetki uhrien muistolle (One-minute Silence For the Victims)' which consists of background grinding computer noise overlaid by coughing and a few other incidental noises as if Puhuu was attending a religious service or funeral. Without the benefits of English language lyrics, I can only wonder whether Puhuu had his possibly acidic tongue wedged firmly in his cheek or not; are the 'victims' referred to ourselves because we have allowed technological and other forms of authoritarianism as suggested by the music and the track titles to dominate us fully? Anyway I like this recording very much and recommend it if you are not put off by Herr Puhuu's manners.

JENNIFER HOR

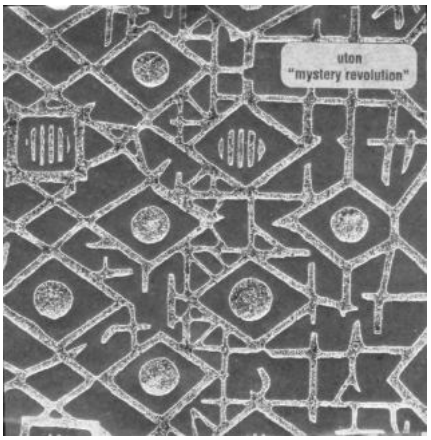
www.ektrorecords.com

Uton

Mystery Revolution

USA DIGITALIS INDUSTRIES DIGI026 CD (2006)

We did note Uton's 3-CD retrospective on Last Visible Dog, reviewed in issue 14; at that time I was intrigued but not totally convinced by what I thought was a band of obscure Finns and their brand of mysterious acoustic plunking. I find that Uton is in fact a solo project, one Jani Hirvonen from Tampere in Finalnd. And this more recent release is slowly turning my opinion around. It's every bit as vague in its overall tone and direction, but somehow more redolent of the promised mystery elements. The work is apparently inspired by dreams; and the act of trying to 'get behind and beyond' dreams, as much as to recreate them. I'll actively support anything which promotes the richness of the oneiric realms; this proclaimed dream-strategy aligns Uton with the work of French Symbolist painter Odilon Redon, and puts him in solid with me. However, unlike Redo who was good with pinks and greend, there is absolutely no rich and colourful imagery in Uton's music, which continues to be executed by means of acoustic twangs, droning noises, badly-played recorders, percussion brushed and scraped in half-hearted ways, and a little lite electronica. Sometimes odd muffled voices, creeping in like half-perceived spectres, join the murky mix. If I'm making it sound eventful, bear in mind that all the above is delivered by an anonymous, faceless player who has taken a vow to perform at all times with a



stern, austere commitment to total minimalism. CD is packaged in a sumptuous gold-embossed wraparound paper cover with inserts, this release provides no further information about Uton and reveals only that it was recorded in Finland during 2004-2005; however, the photograph of eerie growths in a forest, and facsimiles of certain documents composed of insane runic markings, will provide richly associative information to the imaginative receptors. More 'spooked' than many of the other 'free-folk' Finns, Uton is a weird semi-articulate exile, who lives in a totally private world.

ED PINSENT 07/08/2006

www.digitalisindustries.com

Paavoharju

Yhä Hämärää

FINLAND FONAL RECORDS FR-37 CD (2005)

An unlikely trio of born-again ascetic Christians, one of whom rejoices in the unlikely Christian name of Ragnar Rock (?!) and all living in a remote town in eastern Finland, is responsible for this beautiful and bewitching recording in which a highly eclectic array of musical and sonic influences can be found: reggae rhythms, field recordings and found sounds, distorted electronics, folksy acoustic guitars, lots of murky atmosphere, liquid piano, lounge music kitsch, church hymns and acid-tinged psychedelia, to name but a few (!), all make an appearance even if more sensed than heard. Add to the various combinations of this melange a knack for writing silvery melodies that border on the sublime, a total lack of irony in the lyrics and their delivery and an ethereal nymph's sinuous voice that might have come from an improbable genetic experiment involving Kate Bush's cells or those of the Cocteau Twins singer Elizabeth Fraser spliced with those of Aishwarya Rai or some other actress in one of those Bollywood masala flicks, and I can see how such an intoxicating brew made several Top 10, Top 50 or similar album lists for 2005. I find the songs that feature the female sprite vocals, the spaghetti western guitars and / or cheap keyboard electronics to be superior to those featuring male vocals (of which there are mercifully only two) and in this regard the best tracks are the middle ones: 'Syvyys', 'Puhuri' (lovely trilling piano runs), 'Ilmaa Virtaa' (very nice melodious keyboard work there) and the highlight of the album, 'Aamuauringon Tuntuinen', which is a delicious strummy piece dripping with sultry flamenco or spaghetti western influences depending on where you're coming from covered with a heavy acid-tinged psychedelic sheen which makes our nymph sound as if she's singing at the bottom of a steel shaft.

The music tends to sag towards the end with more conventional singing (this is where our fairy girl recedes into the background and the men take over) and less inspired melodies that are only just redeemed by the musical eclecticism. I understand this section is meant to be sort of a wrap-up for the entire album which revolves around the theme of a quest; it's difficult to say though whether such a resolution is appropriate or a more ambiguous open-ended coda should have been used since the Finnish lyrics are not printed or translated into English. Still, happy ending or no happy ending, I'd rather have this kind of earnest Christian religious music instead of the usual nauseating clap-happy pop-rocky garbage where you're forced to be happy and if you don't cheer or clap loudly enough you're half-way on the road to fiery damnation.

JENNIFER HOR

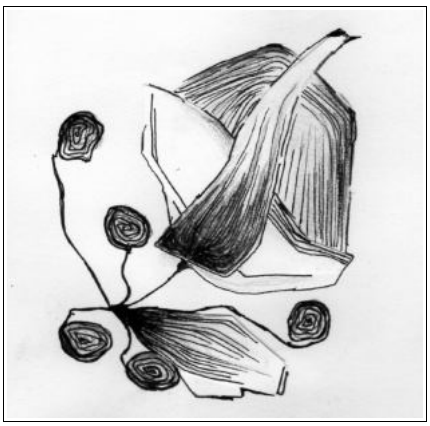
Fonal Records: www.fonal.com
Paavoharju: www.parvoharju.com

Sala-Arhimo

Sala-Arhimo

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 094 CD (2006)

11 songs and instrumentals from a strumming, singing and droning Finn. Jukka Räisanen is one half of Islaja, but here he fills the whole bill himself playing everything in sight, including a meandering but convincing sax solo on the instrumental piece. His pleasant acoustic ditties are based on acoustic guitar finger-plucking rhythms and circular figures, not unlike a copy of Bert Jansch. He adds vocals in a crystal-clear voice, often pinning a song down with a minimal organ drone, or may be heard occasionally taking a diversion into an episode of slightly barmy percussion scrape and bang. He sings in Finnish throughout, and due to my own linguistic limitations I have no insights to offer on his subjects and themes, but I can tell you that wildlife and nature (in the form of birds and trees) loom large on his hand-crafted sleeve-art statements. Much the same as any Finnish folk-psych record, in fact. There's a certain nostalgia evoked by his best melodies, and I admire the precision of his execution. That said, it may not be quite loose or experimental enough if you prefer the somewhat madder stuff available on Fonal records.



ED PINSENT 08/07/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

Es

Sateenkaarisuudelma

BELGIUM (K-RAA-K)3 KED02 2 x LP (2005)

Es is Sami Sänpäkkilä, a wonderful fellow from Finland who runs the Fonal Records label, and whose 2006 visit to the UK I managed to miss. Late in 2005 he issued this fantastic double LP *Sateenkaarisuudelma*, comprising just eight instrumentals of an absolutely dazzling beauty. His direct and honest notes to the release make it clear just how much this gentle fellow is in tune with his muse, and how much he understands his own material; the collection includes tunes which he's been playing live since about 2002. Realised with the help of Americans Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg from Black Forest / Black Sea, and Laura Naukkarinen, this is limpid, crystal-clear acoustic and electronic music built out of mesmeric drones, gorgeous tuneful patterns woven from gold, and soaring melodies of celestial purity. I can whole-heartedly recommend this beautiful release to the whole world!

ED PINSENT

www.kraak.net

Rauhan Orkesteri and Lauhkeat Lampaat

Sylissain Oot

CANADA ACHE RECORDS ACHE 024 CD (2006)

A Finnish combo pick up saxes and flutes and try their hand at a set of quirky, Ornette Coleman-influenced free jazz. The Nordic countries (including Sweden and Iceland) have a tradition of attempting jazz and usually wind up getting it majorly wrong somehow (maybe they take it too seriously), but this one is fun and has a certain conviction in its jauntiness. On this second full-length release from the Rauhan Orkesteri (whose name means Peace Orchestra), there's a tinge of magic-mushroom addledness that somehow lifts it out of the land of Toytown (for some reason, it sounds like it's being played on toy instruments). Besides the free jazz pastiches, they use the same instruments (including acoustic bass, percussion, bells and whatnot) to create an appealing form of scrape, bump and tinkling free improv music.

Guest appearance from Lauhkeat Lampaat (whose name means Meek Sheep) on three tracks; these all feature intoning voices making their moan, and are generally mysterious acoustical things referring to unknown events. Cover art has a comforting 'nursery' image of children at play which seems to be taken from an old piece of fabric, and adds an odd nostalgic touch to this charming oddity. Originally available as an LP from QBICO.

ED PINSENT 20/08/2006

www.acherecords.com

Tender Buttons

Tender Buttons

DENMARK CAT BOX CORP CBC09

2 x 3" CDR (2004)

10 pretty songs played and sung with accompaniment of guitars, melodica, and occasional background noise effects from a radio or mouth organ, done by a trio of Danes: Marc Kellaway with his friends Marie and Tanja Jensen, who went to Sweden to make this record, inspired by the work of Gertrude Stein. They took a four-track tape recorder with them and it broke down, so they had to carry out the project in a shack out in the woods using a mini-disc device. These circumstances can only have added to the intimacy and charm that shows up on the grooves.

These songs are all acoustic, very sweet, simple and endearing; only one of them, 'A Leave', has anything approaching a smidgeon of edginess, discomfort or grit, and might even be mistaken for a post-punk band such as Lilliput going unplugged. For the rest, think of Nico's very

earliest pop singles, because even though they have neither the chops nor the production values, Tender Buttons seem to live in a world where no musical development after 1966 took place. Well, that's not totally accurate, as the lo-fi approach on this CDR would have been unthinkable without all the cassette bands and bedroom guitarists. Indeed a bedroom recording is what this is, full of an honesty that's almost painful to listen to. The spacey and open one-mic setup reveals all the band's faults, including the hesitancy in the singing and all the false notes in the stumbling guitar-picking. But who couldn't be won over by their fey singing style, the bittersweet emotions? Like other releases from Marc Kellaway, this is packed in a lovely hand-made card gatefold sleeve containing two mini-CDRs, colour photos of the forest, and hand-lettered info with a pen. Long live DIY values – creators are getting more imaginative all the time.

ED PINSENT 15/10/2006

tenderbuttons@yahoo.dk
Distributed by www.bsbta.dk

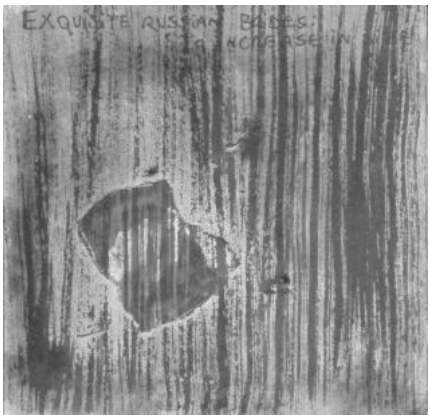
The President's Heart

The Supreme Record

DENMARK CAT BOX CORP CBC 03

CDR

One of three records in a 'barely exists' edition to be sent here from Denmark; the other two were Tender Buttons and Exquisite Russian Brides. The President's Heart debuted on BSBTA in Denmark and this is their first release since then. This one is 12 charming and quirky songs recorded by a bedroom band of young enthusiasts, using mostly odd acoustic instruments and delivering plenty of moments of genuine unpredictability in their minimal, stark, full-of-holes arrangements. If it was 1979 or 1983, one would not have been surprised to see Rough Trade issue some of this on an EP. Kount Krickett and Dorothy Parker form the band, using xylophones, organ, bells, ukelele, flute, and no end of clattery percussion; Vita Wrapovitz adds her vocals on top, her voice slithering around the awkward melodies like a dozen grass snakes on a hot stone. The Angry Lesbians appear as guests. I assume all the above names are aliases for Marc Kellaway and his friends. Fans of The 49 Americans and The Residents should find much to entertain them, even if the sometimes-affected 'silly' voices may grate. Recorded in Arhus in 2003, this is ample evidence that the Finns don't have the monopoly on quirky avant-acoustic songs. Package is totally handmade; two colour photos mounted on a



manila card sleeve, all information hand-lettered with a fibre-tip pen.

ED PINSENT 20/07/2006

www.bsbta.dk
www.soundstation.dk
thepresidentsheart@yahoo.dk

Exquisite Russian Brides

To Increase in Size

DENMARK CAT BOX CORP CBC13

CDR (2005)

Another obscurity from Denmark, this one a CDR being mostly the work of that worthy Marc Kellaway, and comprising two lengthy and highly magisterial drone-works. These live recordings were made at a church in Copenhagen in 2005, with some additional recording made a few days before the main event (if I'm reading the sleeve notes correctly). He did all this with a synthesiser, tape loops, organ, prepared tapes, accordion, voice, flute, and lots more; and enlisted aid from his friends, the violinist Marie Jensen and electric guitarist Tanja Jensen. Besides being tinged with an attractive bittersweet melancholy, both pieces convey a fantastic sense of scale – of tallness and height on the first track, of breadth and distance on the second. A vertical followed by a horizontal, as it were, both spreading upward and onward for infinite distances. It's like entering a vast cathedral of the mind. Fans of Ashtray Navigations and Organum will appreciate these deep drones and massive sounds, the chiming, groaning, and lurching movement of it all, as gargantuan abstract shapes form out of thin air and collide in slow motion. The cover is handmade, as piece of plain card decorated with a watercolour painting and indian ink, plus hand-lettered information.

ED PINSENT 27/07/2006

marckellaway@get2net.dk
Distributed by www.bsbta.dk

Pink Luminous Invocation

Pink Luminous Invocation

DENMARK FOXGLOVE CBC15 CDR

(2006)

This is another Marc Kellaway side project, again featuring Marie A Jensen on vocals and synth and Magnus O Majmon on bells, vocals, kalimba, and a very good episode of moaning clarinet work; Kellaway plays the remainder...it lulls you with a nice angelic drone for the first half (it's a

single piece of music) with the gorgeous vocalising of Jensen, while the second half shows things taking a darker, more sinister turn. It builds up to a rattling percussive climax and leaves you stranded, attempting to fathom its mystery. As title suggests it does indeed evoke some form of magical ceremony or invocation, one whose luminosity is beyond question or cavil, even though its 'pinkness' may be an entirely subjective factor. This effect is created mostly by the extended length of the piece and the evidence of its creators' extreme concentration; the musicians are so wrapt in what they're doing, they appear to have the single-minded focal qualities of a hawk. A live recording from early 2006, with a woodland cover drawing depicting a deer among some trees in a smudgy ink drawing. A nice one.

ED PINSENT 29/07/2006

www.digitalisindustries.com

Nash Kontroll

Your Left Hand Just Exploded
SWEDEN iDEAL RECORDINGS iDEAL027 CD (2005)

Pretty good set of saxophone and electronic noise from trio of Mats Gustafsson, Dror Feiler and Lasse Marhaug. Both Gustafsson and Feiler are puffing their hearts out on various ranges of saxophone, sometimes 'prepared' and probably fed through whatever available electronic devices came their way, while my favourite Norwegian Lasse 'Lunchtime' Marhaug throws in lots of live electronics, laptop spew, guitar bursts, and hot fresh noise doled out from his magic saucepans like spoonfuls of spicy clam chowder. They did it in 2004 for Swedish Radio. I hated this record at first, since the opening 10-15 minutes were, as I recall, disjointed and spiky and everyone was taking too long to get to the point. Today though, this play reveals a topnotch session of 'grumbly and whiney' noise, much like three old men nagging away insistently on some futile topic or other, and a place for it in my heart will be assured long after they have bored away what's left of my ribcage. While some of these modern noisefests can come across like pointless free-for-all land-grabs and ego-trips, this one conversely is a genuine collaboration and shows much genuine communication between three very good players; you just have to listen your way in, get past the wild and spiky surface. It's not a relentless attack of pounding hell, nor is it 'jazzy' in the sense you might expect from a situation where two trained sax-puffers are giving their all (no shades of Borbetomagus, nor that Marhaug / Gjerstad collaboration from last year). Indeed in places it can settle into some very pleasing near-melodic moments. Three long tracks, terrible cover art, and a typical 'festival setup' photo of three young intense and balding men with mixing desks and low-key lighting. I say 'festival', even when it was recorded in a studio, but you can bet the idea for doing it arose from one of those awful incestuous and promiscuous events that currently blight our big cities, where everyone acts so 'chummy' with each other as they strive to advance their careers. However, I don't blame these three for that state of affairs! Package is redeemed by its red inlay tray, and a nice X-ray photograph of a hand.

ED PINSENT 08/10/2006

info@idealrecordings.com
www.idealrecordings.com

John Hegre / Maja Ratkje

Ballads
GERMANY DEKORDER 015 CD (2006)

Pretty irritating...it's a set of highly perplexing non-musical non-tunes, produced possibly by mainly acoustic sound sources. The sounds include something like a clicking typewriter or a malfunctioning sewing machine that's gotten jammed up. Individual plucks from an acoustic guitar, stopped before they can actually resonate or form a musical note. Short inhalations of breath, and fragments of voice which cut out just before they actually form a complete word. Maybe some field recordings, something that sounds vaguely like a big crowd of murmuring idiots who have lost their way. And other unrecognisable things. As you can tell from above catalogue, the one thing these sounds have in common is that they *can't get started*. The typewriter / sewing machine in particular will drive you up the wall as you hear it failing to perform in any meaningful way. The title of the record should be *Frustration*, not *Ballads*. Everything is pieced together in very short and small pieces, perhaps from digital samples; it's the exact opposite of a mosaic, because you don't even get a coherent picture at the end of it.

In their efforts to do something new, experimental, exciting and creative, it seems to me that these two Norwegian players are trying extremely hard to avoid anything too 'obvious' in this work. This includes anything so obvious as forming a recognisable pattern, or a simple repetition. This is perhaps something to be admired, but it seems that in so doing they have forgotten to make music. *Ballads* is an infuriating

listen. Credit is given to Jon Halvor for the 'bread box instrument', a device whose name at least sounds particularly intriguing, and may be responsible for the above typewriter / sewing machine noises which have caused such exasperation in my house. Hegre and Ratkje are a couple of important people (the latter as part of Fe-Mail, one of my fave noise combos), but they have managed to get it wrong in the past, sometimes with Lasse Marhaug in tow. Recorded in Oslo 2004-05, this set of quiet, minimal, whirring and rattling will induce impatience and discomfort in many listeners with its incessant, tepid blather.

ED PINSENT 06/08/2006

www.dekorder.com

Pointius Piratus

Blood is the Ocean
NORWAY LETZTON RECORDS 03 CDR (2005)

Some engaging moments of discordant freakery from this mysterious combo who use electronica, voice, guitar and flute, but equally quite a lot of dreary ambient meandering too. They're a trio from Norway. Ezox Lukii does the guitar and electronic work, Silvia the voice. Flautist may not be core member; only appears briefly on one track on this short EP. Project is thus mainly an ego-trip for Ezox to allow lengthy explorations of his darkened psyche. A murky cover photo of graveside statuary does not lighten the oppressive mood.

ED PINSENT 08/07/2006

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http://kunst.no/isak

Zang:

The Opposing Player's Move
NORWAY ZANG: Z:007 CDR

Zang: is both a label and a musical project, a simple fact which confused me somewhat. Our good friend Pål Asle Pettersen from Stavanger is responsible for five of these nine tracks, and Helge Olav takes credit for the remainder. They're both reworking the music of Nils Henrik Asheim, who created the original '16 pieces for organ'; fragments of organ sound surface in amongst the digital mosaics. Asheim thus becomes the 'opposing player' in their cut-up and sample strategies, which they treat like games of chess. But it's not a purely cerebral exercise; much sinister power emerges from between the cracks, veering from strangely

disquieting instrumentals which meander in a mad way, to more clearly patterned pieces and heavily rhythmic blasts, some with near-industrial beats. A much more focused work than I've come to expect from these wispy, uncertain Norwegian electro-acousticers as they skip among the forests clutching their Ampexes in one hand and a basket of flowers in the other. A short CDR, not very well presented, although the cover has a nice detail of church organ pipes making them look like barrels of a gun. Although the methodology is good and there are flashes of energy, it's hard to evade the pallor of gloom on this serious-minded record. Be sure to look for the previous release in this series, where they reworked the music of improv sax player Frode Gjerstad.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2006

www.zang.no/paalasle.html

Pål Asle Pettersen

Skjegg

NORWAY ZANG: Z:009 CDR

Pettersen spews out an unpalatable and ill-fitting jumble of materials on this CDR: found sounds, electronic music, beats, and field recordings. It's as if he wanted every single moment to be as repellent and charmless as possible, as he brutally twists each sound-source out of shape like a kid torturing insects. 50 micro-tracks of pure incoherence ensue. With this, Pettersen is trying to create a series of 'short-track albums'. The first one came out on vinyl at Humbug Records, was called *spor...* and boasted 12 one-minute tracks. With *Skjegg*, he is trying to take 'the concept a step further'. We interviewed this electro-acoustic artiste in issue 10 (2002), where he gave one clue to this side of his work: 'I also try to alienize some sounds or to break the illusion by manipulating the sounds or placing them in a different context.' Well, there's no doubt that any listener would be thoroughly 'alienized' by this release.

ED PINSENT 31/08/2006

www.zang.no/paalasle.html

Roggbif Records

The very hardworking visual artist and designer Sten Ove Toft is not only one half of Ryfylke, he also runs Roggbif Records in Norway, and now its new 'sister' sublabel NOISE2 which he established in October 2006. On the available evidence NOISE2 dedicated to releasing noisy music on CDR. Here's some of his newies.

Ryfylke

Morild / Nuema Brister

NORWAY ROGGBIF RECORDS RR013 LP (2006)

Norwegians Stian Skagen and Sten Ove Toft were last heard from as this duo act in 2004, with their *Boknafjord* tour de force; that release took a combination of field recordings and pure noise and fed them both through mangled cassette-deck technology with the slow inexorability of a glacier. This 'newie' is a lot more subdued than that roaring beast of 04, but it's worth a casual visitor staying the course to pick up vivid impressions of water, sunsets, thunderstorms, and very controlled explosions taking place in slow motion. They do it by blending the analogue with the digital; Toft with his tapes of field recordings and found sounds, Skagen with his digital feedback, source code and data files converted into sheets of sound. By such methods, Skagen and Toft assume the aspect of experimental scientists bent on creating their own planet. These two lengthy, slow suites of grinding pain and icy cold conditions convey a stately grandeur in spite of the apparent inhospitableness. This is an LP release; I have a CDR promo but even so the packaging looks good, using nifty acetate overlays printed in black. These highly-processed natural sounds are as welcome as

shafts of sunlight after rainfall.

ED PINSENT 31/08/2006

Te Koop

Tienen

NORWAY NOISE2 2004 CDR (2006)

Document of a short, one-off live concert of hellish harsh noise; Te Koop is a band, and may or may not be a clutch of well-known Norwegians masquerading under a zany alias, in order to let their lank hair down even further than usual. Presumably Te Koop only existed for this one event and we're unlikely to be seeing a box set of their collected concerts. In this one, someone shouts 'Let's make some noise!' at the start, then they all make noise for about 20 minutes. They did it at a venue in Belgium, much to the audible delight of a whooping, roaring crowd – who not only whoop and roar at the end of the show, but do so through much of the performance also. Their vocal contributions may add quite a lot of texture to the overall caste of *Tienen*, which starts off extremely harsh, but whose intense racket does settle down into certain comparatively soothing passages which are somewhat more listenable. Even so there isn't much in the way of technique that's wildly new here: men with mikes, mixing desks, amplification, and lots of feedback.

ED PINSENT 08/11/2006

Utarm

Substitute of Dimention Hell

NORWAY NOISE2 2003 CDR (2006)

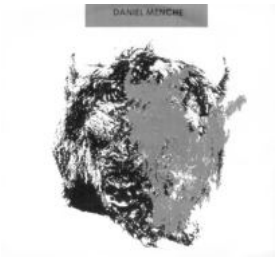
Sinister, atmospheric, and vaguely Satanic noise hereon; all done by a one-man project. For sure, Mr Utarm manages some good axe-based riffing in the 'slow stoner' style, and also conjures up certain weighty noises that resemble entire avalanches of snow hurtling down a mountain slope to crush the innocent villagers below. Track 2, his vision of 'Hades', is vivid; screams, clattering swords, fire alarms, sound effects of limbs being sawn off with blunt saws, and a general portrait of an abysmal, inescapable Hell. 'Blasphemepedemik Supervisor' is also noteworthy, its massive dimensions suggestive of a gigantic, roaring maw – perhaps the mouth of Hell itself opening up to swallow us all. 'Ice', and certain passages of 'Downfall', reside in the area of chilly atmospheric ambient sound-art. Sleeve art and titles confirm the Black Metal aspirations

of this one; Toft is proud of its avant-ish credentials, calling it 'the new hope for Norwegian Black Metal'. Got to admit, this one's a grower.

ED PINSENT 08/11/2006

Daniel Menche

Beast Resonator
NORWAY ROGGBIF RECORDS RR014 CD (2006)



Menche seems to have managed no fewer than seven releases across international labels this year; here is one of them. *Beast Resonator* is intended to have an extreme, powerful effect on the listener; Menche wants to remind us of our pre-human existence, and proposes 'a primal attack on the senses' with this ultra-powerful rhythmic noise. To build these rhythms, he effectively mixes several drum and percussion tracks together, intent on creating a primitive trance with very nihilistic consequences; he wants everything to end in 'hypnotic destruction'. The only drawback here is that the work appears to have been executed through the use of layers and tape loops, perhaps in a computer; it's not actually an hour's worth of physical drum-beating, an event which might have been something more interesting. However, if you play this loud enough the intended pagan terror will certainly march its way into your heart. Menche is a very physical, extreme performer, whose live situations are likely to be uncompromising brutal assaults, filled with blood and sweat. Personally, I've got to prefer him to the utterly preposterous Z'ev, and Menche's work is much more varied, but he's no less stern about it; his grim countenance makes every Menche release I've heard an utterly joyless experience.

ED PINSENT 08/11/2006

Jon Eriksen / Sten Ove Toft / Utarm

Penumbra Booming
NORWAY ROGGBIF RECORDS RR017 CD (2006)

Compilation of four tracks; label boss Toft is one of the stars, joined by local experimental Black Metal project Utarm, and the Swedish sound and video artist Jon Eriksen. Eriksen has two tracks here and they're mostly composed of random, exploding noise; lots of sonic activity in evidence, but results are strangely boring to listen to. Sten achieves a certain grandeur with his subtle 17-minute 'Sycamore Croquet Risky' piece, a loop of sawmill-type harsh droning sounds. Constructed according to a simple gradient structure, this hypnotic loop has a very compelling surface as it slowly draws you towards an inexorable doom; said doom manifests itself in the final three minutes, an increasingly unacceptable vortex of painful noise hell. Utarm is different again from his two compadres, constructing sinister mood music perhaps working from a complex range of computer samples; looped minor-key chords, strings, bells, and other musical sounds are deployed in a hard-to-fathom pattern, creating a tense and gloomy mood. My sympathy for the animal kingdom is evoked by the pictures of the dead deers on the cover, their carcasses arranged in cryptic Gilbert and George-esque patterns.

ED PINSENT 08/11/2006

Waffelpung

Storeslem
NORWAY ROGGBIF RECORDS RR016 VINYL LP (2006)

Nine baffling tracks of distorted electro-gibberish from the duo of Sten Ove Toft and Yngve Sortland, cherry-picking from their collaborations realised during 1999-2002. Over 30 minutes, we hear mostly rather short experiments in peculiar sounds and wild tape edits; each piece grows stranger and wilder as it acquires additional layers and events. Power electronics, drones, tape loops, samples; it's all here. Yet for all the extreme shifts in sonic range, this work remains rather blankly anonymous, conveying an odd sense of futility. This is a re-release of their debut LP, originally issued in 2002.

ED PINSENT 08/11/2006

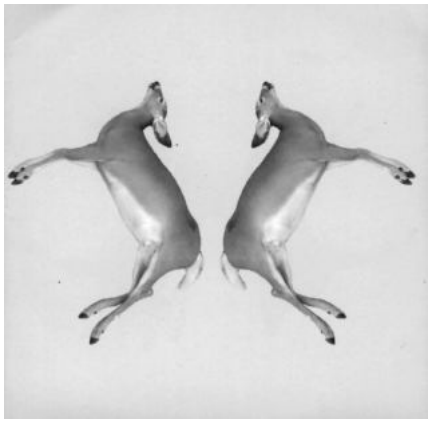
Stian Skagen / Morten Halvorsen / Sten Ove Toft

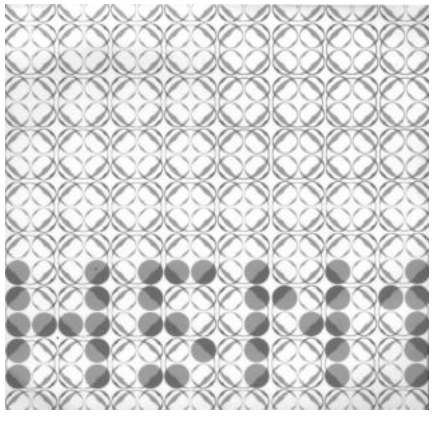
H5N1
NORWAY ROGGBIF RECORDS RR008 CD (2006)

Three tracks of ambient drone scapes; the least noisy release of all that's on offer from Roggbif this season. Of the three, Toft stands out with his 'Petit Mal', not for the originality of his droning sounds, but for the ideas he has about compositional structure and development, things which seemed to have been overlooked by Skagen and Halvorsen in their rush to nail down a particular mood or fleeting emotion. Skagen is the other half of Ryfylke. The title refers to the influenza virus A subtype known as 'avian flu', but our musicians here mean no malice when they liken their music's effect to a virus; they're simply interested in something that mutates constantly and spreads to infect its listeners (in a good way) across the international stage.

ED PINSENT 08/11/2006

www.roggbif.com
www.roggbif.com/noise2
www.myspace.com/stenovetoft





INTERNATIONAL MUSICS SELECTION

By Jennifer Hor

Nai Htaw Paing Ensemble

Mon Music of Burma

USA FIRE MUSEUM RECORDS FM02 CD (2006)

This recording seems intended as an introduction for Western audiences to the traditional music of a poorly known and very small ethnic minority in one of the world's most secretive countries, Burma / Myanmar. At this time of writing, I'm still not sure if Yangon is still the official capital of the country. All 13 tracks on this CD are fairly short and feature quite delicate yet dignified and often stately music played by a five-piece group led by Nai Htaw Paing who is an academic at a university in Yangon; he plays a number of instruments including one called a batt kine which is a row of about 14 tuned gongs attached to a large carved wooden frame in the shape of an upturned crescent or giant watermelon rind. This instrument features as a solo instrument on track three and in spite of its size and spectacular appearance produces very exquisite fairy-like tones. Other traditional Mon instruments heard on this CD include a zither in the shape of a crocodile, a set of tuned drums, bamboo flutes, a bamboo xylophone, an oboe-like reed instrument and a fiddle that sounds much like the dry-sounding Chinese fiddle known as erhu.

On a number of tracks, there is a female singer but no ensemble or choral singing is featured at all. The music can sound a bit like traditional Chinese music without the head-banging tinny percussion or the sickly sweet Chinese zithers or like music from India, Indonesia and even the Middle East, and no doubt cultural influences from all these places have criss-crossed Burma / Myanmar at times. Various tracks highlight the range and sounds of solo instruments (the oboe-like flute is showcased on track 10 and track 12 features the bamboo xylophone) and the musicians' skills in playing them. Though there is nothing really very dramatic, passionate or flamboyant about the pieces here and it's easy to think that either the musicians are erring on the side of caution and that there is much, much more to Mon music than is featured here, or that the Mons really were an eminently sane and rational people who strove for modesty and moderation in everything they did (a bit unlikely for a people who liked to carve zithers in the forms of crocodiles!), on the whole the music is very good and has some lovely sounds and melodies.

From what I have been able to find about the Mons, they number no more than a few million in Burma / Myanmar and Thailand where they are under pressure to assimilate their culture to the dominant peoples in those countries; and many ethnic Mon do not speak the Mon language, which is related to Khmer. The Mons were dominant in these countries about a thousand years ago and introduced many cultural institutions, including Theravada Buddhism and a writing system. This CD is part of an effort to preserve Mon culture, and the music was recorded and produced by musicologist Rick Heizman, who has collected and documented much traditional Burmese music on several albums.

JENNIFER HOR

Rick Heizman: earthviewmusic@yahoo.com
Fire Museum: www.museumfire.com

Iva Bittova / Bang on a Can All-Stars

Elida

USA CANTALOUPE MUSIC CA21027 CD (2005)

If she could sing in English, the chirpy Czech lady with the violin could have been as big a star as Kate Bush. On the first song especially, Iva Bittova twitters and warbles as if flying with the fairies and the sparrows is something she does every day before breakfast. Collaborators Bang on a Can All-Stars keep a fairly low profile most of the time to allow Bittova's singing and violin skills to flourish. As the album progresses, the music settles into a comfortable and steady if not exciting groove and becomes quite intimate, if somewhat formal: sort of like a chamber music group augmented by a jazzy cabaret session giving a recital at a private function. The style of

the music is lite classical with influences like Slavic folk, jazz, a bit of rock and early 20th century European popular music (a bit of klezmer creeps in at one point) to add flavour and atmosphere. The most enjoyable songs are ones like 'Maliri v Parizi' and 'Zapiskej' where Bittova lets loose her clear vivacious tones all babbling and trilling, though I admit that slower pieces like 'Samota' allow Bittova to demonstrate her fine vocal control and genuine feeling.

But Bittova does not sing in English, and so the profile she does have allows her to sing and perform in a way that's highly idiosyncratic and interesting: very like a light and bubbly version of Diamanda Galas when she was younger and hadn't yet wrecked the higher registers of her voice with the shrieking. On the other hand, Elida could have been more substantial in subject matter (a love song to a bar of soap?) and in the music itself which tends to bore during some of the instrumental parts.

JENNIFER HOR

www.cantaloupemusic.com

Albert Kuvezin and Yat-Kha

Re-Covers

UK YAT-KHA RECORDINGS YAT004 / GERMANY PLÄNE PLANE88918 CD (2005)

Tuvan throat-singer Albert Kuvezin leads two bands: Huun Huur Tu which plays traditional Tuvan folk music and Yat-Kha which combines Tuvan folk with Western rock / pop music. For *Re-Covers*, Kuvezin chose a number of famous and not-so-famous Western rock and pop songs from the 1960s - 70s and rendered them as Tuvan folk songs complete with khomus (mouth harp) and chadagan (zither) accompaniment and of course Kuvezin's own particular style of kargyraa throat-singing. The Tuvans, who live northwest of Mongolia and west of Lake Baikal

in Siberia, share many cultural traditions with their neighbours the Mongols and Buryats, including throat-singing. They have developed about six different styles of this kind of singing, of which the kargyraa style features a very low drone and even lower harmonics, reminiscent of Tibetan Buddhist chanting.

While I'd like to say *Re-Covers* is stunning in the way songs by artists like Joy Division, Kraftwerk, Led Zeppelin, Bob Marley, Motorhead and The Rolling Stones are put through Kuvezin's super-deep and gravelly voice that sounds like he chain-smokes 1,000 cigarettes a day together with the high-pitched ghostly whistling he produces - it's a characteristic of Tuvan / Mongolian throat-singing that singers can sing and whistle at the same time - the reality is that the album is rather patchy. Some songs, like Vladimir Vysotsky's 'Pesnya O Giraffe' and Joy Division's 'Love Will Tear Us Apart', don't showcase the band's talents all that well. Growing up in Siberia 30 - 40 years far away from the main centres of rock and pop and under a repressive government suspicious of all foreign fads meant that Kuvezin had limited access to much of that music, so naturally he only covers what he is familiar with and which resonates most with him. If he knew more of Joy Division's work especially songs like 'Warsaw', 'Komakino', 'She's Lost Control' and 'Heart and Soul', Kraftwerk's corpus of work from 'Trans-Europe Express' through to including 'Tour de France' (jeez, what he could have done with 'Tour de France'!) and maybe even Slayer's 'Angel of Death' other than their version of Iron Butterfly's 'In A Gadda Da Vida' (because I can't hear too much of Slayer in that song!), we might have had a really rockin' record!

I do prefer some songs like Bob Marley's 'Exodus' which has a mad galloping instrumental passage embellished with Kuvezin's eerie whistling, Fleetwood Mac's 'Black Magic Woman' and Motorhead's 'Orgasmatron': these are songs that happen to have a very strong personal appeal for Kuvezin and particularly with 'Orgasmatron' he tries to respect and preserve the spirit and lyrics of the original piece. Led Zeppelin's 'When the Levee breaks' is a strong opener with instrumental sections where Kuvezin lets rip with his low drones and whistling which sounds like the wind soughing through the grass of the vast steppes of his homeland. On the other hand there are songs like the Chieftains' 'The Wild Mountain Thyme' and the aforementioned Joy Division's 'Love ...' where Kuvezin's droning voice seems rather comic and on the drunken side; I think sentimentality is rather dangerous for him. Fortunately many songs including the clunkers feature extended musical improvisations where the zithers, mouth harps and other instruments mimic waterfalls, the rush of spring-water and the rhythms of galloping horses. If Yat-Kha's music is at all representative of Tuvan folk music, then Tuvan folk and similar styles may not be all that far from what US country and western music might have been once before commercialism corrupted and ossified it and turned it into something to jeer at.

In all, this is a fun album despite its shortcomings and a very enjoyable introduction to throat-singing and the native music of the Siberian steppes. Much of this music reflects an animistic view of nature and expresses its spirituality and human beings' relations to it.

JENNIFER HOR

Yat-Kha: www.yat-kha.com
References: Theodore C Levin and Michael E Edgerton, 'The Throat Singers of Tuva', Scientific American.com, www.sciam.com
Joe Kissell's Interesting Thing of the Day: http://itotd.com/articles/488

Gétatchèw Mèkurya

Negus of Ethiopian Sax (Ethiopiques 14)

FRANCE BUDA MUSIQUE 82256 CD (2003)

Though I know next to nothing about jazz-based improv or free jazz and have only heard a small bit of John Zorn's sax playing, this particular recording of all-instrumental Ethiopian jazz music from the 1960s through to early 1970s has made quite an impression on me. The music is very free and distinctive and you can really hear the joy, enthusiasm and passion with which virtuoso sax player Getatchew Mèkurya plays his tenor sax. Throughout the CD, he plays the sax as an extension of the human voice, infusing its usually blaring tones with warmth and emotion particularly on some of the slower tracks that feature a waltz rhythm where the sax leads the other instruments up and down imaginary hills and dales (or whatever passes for such in Ethiopia): the effect can be very hypnotic.

According to the CD booklet, Mèkurya was born in 1935, learned to play traditional Ethiopian stringed instruments before switching to sax and clarinet, and some time in the 1950s hit on the idea of playing his sax in a traditional style of singing known as shellela. Equivalent to the war shouts of ancient Celts or the haka ritual of Maoris in New Zealand without the dancing, shellela is usually improvised and can be very dramatic and flamboyant, and these characteristics of shellela singing obviously appealed to the young Mèkurya for him to adopt a vocal style to an instrument. He extends the range of shellela music generally beyond its purely war-like and other macho functions into pure improvisational territory: nearly every track is a launching pad for the sax to shoot off into the stratosphere and beyond while the accompanying musicians maintain the rhythm (though one imagines they're all looking rather enviously at Mèkurya). Many pieces have quite exotic-sounding rhythms and melodies to begin with anyway so the sax, in spite of its 19th century European origins, ends up an alien and slightly sinister yet bewitching and seductive 'Oriental' instrument to Western ears (I use the term 'Oriental' in the sense of the mysterious Other, the shadow of Western culture).

The tracks on this CD span a period from the late 1950s to 1972, during which time Mèkurya played with various bands and orchestras including the famous Police Band and the Haile Selassie Theatre Orchestra. The sound quality is very good and clear; on tracks where there is piano, the instrument sounds clean and crisp, and where the organ is the accompanying instrument, the keyboards lend a warm air to the music. The last track, having the most mediocre sound, is a very early piece from the 1950s and features shellela sax in what must be the original shellela style: harsh and declamatory with little of the warmth and svelte smoothness Mèkurya would develop later.

As far as I know, Mèkurya has weathered all the vicissitudes that befell and continue to bedevil Ethiopia over the years and, as of 2001 at least, is still performing on a regular basis in a club at the ritzy Sheraton Hotel in Addis Ababa. This CD is an introduction to the incredible work of an outstanding and innovative sax player and to post-World War II Ethiopian jazz. If an album of all-instrumental jazz music dominated by saxophone horrifies you, trust me, this CD ain't boring old bagpipes stuff! However, if this does not reassure you, you may like to try the early volumes of the Ethiopiques series of contemporary Ethiopian music and jazz on the Buda Musique label. As the CD title says, Mèkurya is 'negus' (Amharic for 'king') of Ethiopian jazz and after hearing this music, I'm not one to argue with that shellela kind of statement!

JENNIFER HOR

www.budamusique.com

Various Artists (recorded by John Levy)

Tibetan and Bhutanese instrumental and folk music volume 2

BELGIUM SUB ROSA SR230 CD (2005)

Second volume to the double set I reviewed in TSP #14, this reissue focuses on the everyday music of the common people (for want of a better term) in Bhutan in the early 1970s as against the religious and ceremonial music that dominated the first volume. A significant difference between the two is that the dominant

instruments here are mostly stringed instruments such as the lute-like dramnyen and fiddles plus drums which seem to be of a hand-held / hand-played sort, and any woodwind instruments that happen to feature turn out to be flutes; in short, most if not all the instruments you hear are portable and do double duty as soloing instruments and as instruments to accompany singing and other instruments. The music may as a result be definitely less majestic and imperious than the music of the monasteries of Tibet and Bhutan but the songs and the instrumental music carry more warmth and emotion, and have just as complex a history and carry as many meanings as the religious / ceremonial music. It might sound very grave and full of longing, and speak of solitude and loneliness (and I'll hazard that much of it is meant to be heard over long distances and high mountains) but according to the sleeve notes the subject matter can vary from narratives about all kinds of things realistic and non-realistic (such as wish-granting jewels) to songs about sheep and their wool, to mini-dramas about Buddhist and pre-Buddhist deities. On several tracks, women come to the fore as solo singers and choruses (another significant difference from the double set where they were pretty much in the background singing choruses, which may say something about gender roles in Tibetan and Bhutanese society) and on one track an elderly man's young son helps Dad in singing the high notes.

As on the double set, the editing can be rough and sudden but the quality of the recordings is good considering their age and the recordings have been left in as natural a state as when they were first made. If you can afford to, you definitely need this second volume to complement the first as the music is so different: true, it's a lot plainer and less imposing and powerful (and less manipulative when I think about it) but it's more intimate and melodic, invites contemplation rather than bang you around the head senseless with endless rhythms and droning, and gives an insight into the concerns, beliefs and values of ordinary people in Tibet and Bhutan of over thirty years ago before pop culture and music influences from China and India reached these places. In this sense, this volume is a valuable historical document. I might note also that on this volume women and to a lesser extent children get an opportunity to express themselves as well.

JENNIFER HOR

www.subrosa.net

Zadik Zecharia

Kurdish Melodies played on Zorna

ISRAEL SOMETHING ON THE ROAD CD (2005)

Originally recorded in Jerusalem in 1980 and reissued on CD in 2005, this is a stirring collection of Kurdish folk tunes played by Kurdish-born Israeli musician Zecharia on a woodwind instrument called the zorna. A traditional Kurdish folk instrument which has many counterparts throughout the Middle East and eastern Europe (equivalents are used in the folk music of Bulgaria, Belarus and Lithuania), and even a cousin called the suona in northern China (it's used in Shandong province which borders the Yellow Sea), the zorna is shaped a bit like a skinny trumpet and has a hard, shrill and reedy sound reminiscent of an oboe crossed with a trumpet, and sometimes can seem a bit like Scottish bagpipes if you shut your eyes and the music carry you away - and the music here can do that, let me tell you! Much of the music featured here is of a communal nature: the accompanying dola drum beats out a steady and regular rhythm that invites you to clap your hands, bang the table and dance, and the insistent, often repetitive zorna-playing can have a very trance-like effect. It's very, very hard to ignore this instrument: it has a powerful tone and I can imagine that zorna players must be fit and strong and be able to breathe deeply to play long, long passages of meandering melody without pausing for rest, particularly if they're standing up or walking around. It would seem that the zorna is best played as a solo or lead instrument and not as part of an orchestra.

There are fast melodies and mid-paced melodies that demonstrate Zecharia's technical virtuosity on this instrument but none that might showcase its emotional range. One tune, 'Cazal Cazal', hints at the zorna's potential to express nostalgia and longing for a faraway homeland and several others suggest it is well suited to martial music and commanding warriors to arms. The recording can be a real head-spinner, it's very hypnotic with repetitive if often unvarying tunes, but it's probably not really representative of what can be done with the zorna and I suspect there's a great deal it can offer outside its traditional folk music milieu.

As if in answer to my thoughts, Something On The Road has issued three CDRs of remixes of pieces from this album (SOTRemixed-001, SOTRemixed-002, SOTRemixed-003): these are very short and feature different treatments of the music. The first two remix CD-Rs apply breakbeats and clubby rhythms and atmospheres to the music plus the second CD-R features a 'field recording' of the music spliced with an actual field recording of a street scene. The third and best CDR is psychedelic and trancey with the zorna often distorted in tone and seeming to zoom in and out of focus and to spiral about in the sonic space.

JENNIFER HOR

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Pierre Bastien

Pop

UK REPHLEX CAT 162 CD (2005)

All the music you hear on this album was created by French composer / multi-instrumentalist Pierre Bastien on little machines he made and powered with electro-motors to play various traditional, folk and acoustic instruments from all around the world. The very idea sounds super-geeky and seems the kind of intellectual exercise that only daft geeky types with boring government jobs in a country like France would engage in during their leisure hours but the actual result turns out to be very warm, inviting and quite catchy with a kind of jittery mechanical toy charm while retaining an experimental rigour. The tracks have their own breathless and urgent funkiness and the choice of instruments such as an African talking drum on 'Deed' and a lute or possibly a shamisen on 'Tut', however repetitively played by the machines, adds another more organic dimension to the music. On some pieces you can hear a kind of steady mechanical breathing whirr and I wonder if Bastien intended this noise to demonstrate as it were that his machines indeed have a 'life' and 'culture' all their own.

The production is very clear and all the sounds are up-front which means the music doesn't have a lot of depth; what depth exists to the

music is achieved by layering patterns of repetitive rhythms over one another on each track. As each track progresses, Bastien shifts (or allows such to shift) a gear about twice, perhaps to give the impression of randomness or a growing entropy in the 'system'.

There'll be reviewers who'll say the music is without context but for me it seems very similar to a few CDs I heard in the mid-to-late 1990s: *Iaora Tahiti* by Mouse on Mars, a Bedouin Ascent album whose title I forget and Matmos's self-titled first album, so to these ears at least this music already sounds a bit 'dated'. Certainly an insouciant coolness associated with 90s trance electronica wafts through quite a few tracks like 'Eke' and I can easily imagine the recording as a soundtrack for a club where geeky types who can dance only like marionettes out of old 1960s Gerry and Sylvia Anderson-produced TV shows like *Thunderbirds* are allowed in by robotic bouncers in red shirts, skinny black ties and grey trousers. Since that category of nightclubber includes most of us, I'll shut up now and the rest of you - DANCE!

JENNIFER HOR

www.rephlex.com

Blow-Dried Pop Collage

A Sublime Frequencies roundup

WE LAST LOOKED AT THIS LABEL'S OUTPOURINGS IN issue 13. Time has passed and here's another large batch of music from the far corners of eastern lands released under the aegis of Hisham Mayet and Alan Bishop's Sublime Frequencies label in Seattle. All of these releases come equipped with knowledgeable sleeve notes about the music and culture of the lands they are plucked from, plus tons of colourful and lavish images showing people, costumes, street life, posters, printed matter, etc, all fascinating stimuli designed to amaze and stimulate the western mind. Broadly, there's three distinct areas of exploration in the CDs below: first, eastern music showing influences from westernised forms, especially garage rock and pop (and even country and western music). This area is most likely to appeal to us unreconstructed rock fans, and there are plenty of catchy melodies and groovy beats too. Secondly, radio-based surveys constructed out of contemporary FM and SW broadcasts from foreign lands, and to a certain extent edited as part of the assemblage. These are pretty far-out to begin with, but made all the stronger for the editorial interventions. Thirdly, more straightforward field recordings and ethnic-based musics. These collections may please the collector of 'world music' as it has been broadly labelled. All in all, a lot of it is out of my line, but there's no denying there's some absolutely astonishing music on these collections. And in their favour, these have all been put together by people who know what they're talking about, have travelled widely in these countries, and are genuinely surprised by the way this exciting music has largely been ignored and overlooked in the western world. Sublime Frequencies work overtime to correct this imbalance.

EP 14/10/2006

Streets of Lhasa

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF016 CD

19 documentary pieces recorded in parts of Tibet by Zhang Jian during 2003. Zhang Jian is a musician in an arts and music collective called FM3 in Beijing. This CD has examples of songs by street singers, work songs, and holy songs, mostly unaccompanied but sometimes joined with the San Xian (three-stringed banjo type instrument) or the Erhu, a two-stringed bowed instrument. Radio presenter Steve Barker (of *On The Wire* fame), who wrote the sleeve notes and motivated the project, comes close to hearing something as powerful as Afro-American rural blues in this earthy, direct music.

Harmika Yab Yum: Folk Sounds from Nepal

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF017 CD

'Nepal is one of the most beautiful places on Earth,' claims compiler Robert Millis of Climax Golden Twins, who put together these 11 tracks from a selection of field recordings and 'archival sources' of music and other material from Radio Nepal. In some ways a follow-up to his splendid compilation of Cambodian music for Anomalous Records (*Leaf Music Drunks Distant Drums*). Amongst the dreamy music, we are given aural glimpses of Tibetan life including snake charmers, a wedding procession, a pony train, a festival, dogs barking. The music in the middle of the snake charmer piece, I think by Prem Autan, is particularly haunting. Certainly among the most poetic and lyrical of these SF releases, and by end of CD you'll be agreeing totally with Millis' enraptured view of this enchanted land, wishing you were there in person.

Folk and Pop Sounds of Sumatra Vol 2

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF018 CD

A strong compilation by Alan Bishop, and certainly one to go for if you want the immediacy of pop appeal mingled with the sensation of utter strangeness. 18 choice cuts from the 1960s to the 1980s, with a wide range of ingrained musical styles from this tiny island. Trance beat, orchestral Arabic music, storytelling in vocal style, Pop Minang music, music for ceremony and dance, and 'westernised' pop from Elly Kasim. 'This is among the very best music you've never heard and you need to hear it NOW!' enthuses Bishop. I think my favourites are the numerous examples of 'Orkes Gabus', music which, the theorists suggest, may have been influenced by Islamic settlers from Yemen. It's something about the richness of the sound, the unexpected rhythms, the intense whining of the ouds, and the confidently expressive singing delivery; for example the glorious 'Senjah Indah' by Umni Nadra. A very strong collection this.

Radio Phnom Penh

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF020 CD

Another Alan Bishop assemblage, this taken from Cambodia radio and put together in 2004. The striking cover art features a pistol with a knot tied in the barrel, but every one of Bishop's bullets hits the target nonetheless!

Radio Sumatra: The Indonesian FM Experience

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF021 CD

Another FM radio experience, no less dazzling or intense than the others in this radio series; edited down into manageable bursts and semi-narrative suites by Alan Bishop from a large collection of material drawn from recent (2004)

FM broadcasts, 'to create sequencing which could display the magnitude of possibilities one would encounter while listening to FM radio in Sumatra'. It's certainly bizarre to hear these jingles and station ID segments resembling 1970s-BBC popular radio, only to have them followed by the most extreme and inexplicable segments of music you could imagine. A lot of the music here is quite westernised, but it's still totally nutsoid – warped versions of anything from 1970s adult rock to rap music pass before you on this energetic parade of the unfamiliar and strange.

SF022 is a DVD of a film called *Niger: Magic and Ecstasy in the Shael*, made by Hisham Mayet.. Haven't seen it.

Radio Pyongyang: Commie Funk and Agit Pop from the Hermit Kingdom

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF023 CD

Compiled by Christiaan Virant in Beijing, this comprises the usual heady mix of field recordings, TV and radio excerpts, and some live performances, dating from 1995-1998. The subtitle may clue you in that this particular comp is trying to tell you something about the politics of North Korea. I find this one a bit hard to digest, both artistically and politically.

Guitars of the Golden Triangle

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF024 CD

Subtitle is *Folk and Pop Music of Myanmar (Burma) Vol 2.* Another Alan Bishop compilation from 2005, again full of immediate appeal for us pop and rock fans, this is a showcase of garage and psych music of Burma from the early 1970s. Represented are artists such as the (relatively) well-known Saing Saing Maw and Lashio Theiun Aung, and three unknowns from Shan State and Tounggyi. This music has been rescued from surviving copies of rare Burmese cassettes. 'The tracks are almost impossible to find in any form or quality,' states Bishop. 'This is a phenomenal lost scene and we're thrilled to resurrect it'. For the most part it evokes memories of garage compilations like Pebbles (and the raw sound does nothing to dispel that impression), but of course everything sung in a foreign language and all the instruments, including cheap guitars and tinny organs, are played slightly 'wrong' somehow. There's no denying the strength of the melodies and the urgent energy, although listener expecting nothing but Burmese 'Green Fuz' impressions should be warned there are also some sickly country-and-western styled ballads that even Monkee Davy Jones might have found cloying.

Choubi Choubi! Folk and Pop sounds from Iraq

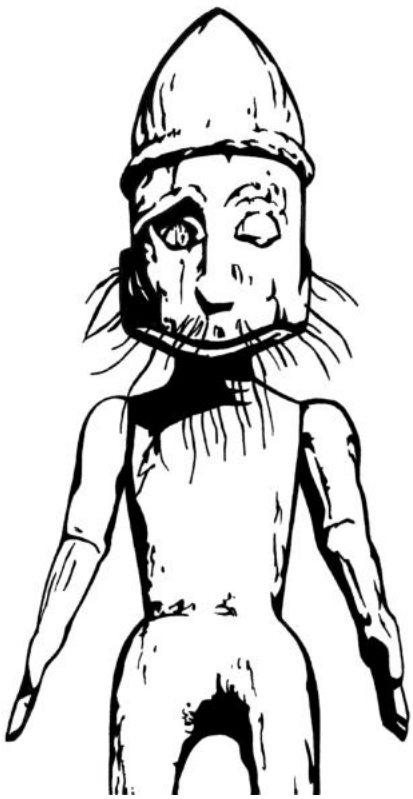
USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF025 CD

Impressive Mark Gergis compilation, containing music produced during the reign of Saddam Hussein from the 1980s up to 2002. Gergis admires the fact that Iraqi culture has survived a 'perpetual series of occupations, coup, revolutions and even sanctions', and concludes that there is a resilience to these peoples in the face of hostility and violent change; nor does he neglect to make acute political observations about the current war-strewn climate. CD contains numerous examples of the Iraqui 'Choubi' style of music with its fiddles, reed instruments, keyboards and ouds played over intense rhythmic beats, and these tracks are indeed most infectious. Also here are three earlier songs by Ja'afar Hassan from his folk-record LP released some time in the 1970s.

Ethnic Minority Music of Northeast Cambodia

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF027 CD

Collection of 16 pieces 'from the mysterious tribes of NE Cambodia', recorded by Laurent Jeanneau around 2003-2005; during his visit, facilitated by friendly and knowledgeable locals, he 'discovered a heaven of gongs and ancient songs on the edge of disappearing'. Like any



good folk-song missionary, he set about recording what he could of this vanishing culture. The music features various gong, flute and stringed instrument players, plus plenty of vocal renderings, and this CD is very quiet and restrained compared to the more brash and startling approach which Bishop and Gergis seem to favour. It's an excellent document of an 'ancient musical patrimony' with very thorough sleeve notes.

Radio Thailand

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF028 CD

Overpowering double-disc collection, assembled from Thai radio broadcasts in Bangkok, Ayuthuya and elsewhere; one disc is compiled by Mark Gergis, the other by Alan Bishop. Both are masterpieces of editing and collage and they maximise the eyebrow-raising capability. Gergis's selections are slightly more recent (2000-2004) and may be adding further evidence to his ongoing subversive commentary about tourism culture (see his work as Porest); Bishop's is slightly more 'archival', dating from 1989-1995. Both offer extreme entertainment for the western ear in the form of fast-moving information streams, foreign language and alien culture overload, and mostly unfamiliar musical styles. Of particular note is Bishop's use of titles such as 'Blow-Dried Pop Collage' and 'Amplitude Massage and Beyond' for his pieces, lending suggestions of Burroughsian themes to these uncanny sonic experiences.

Radio Algeria

USA SUBLIME FREQUENCIES SF029 CD

An Alan Bishop assemblage/edit collection, realised with the help of Tucker Martine and Mark Gergis. Unlike the 'historical' surveys, all of this is taken from recent (2005) broadcasts in Algeria, meaning that geographically it spans 'culture from the Mediterranean coasts to the undefined border areas of the Sahara Desert, and beyond'. The usual diversity is much in evidence: there's Berber folk music, Arabic pop, lush orchestral tunes, sacred music, and certain hybrid musical styles showing European influences. As DJ announcements, radio adverts and links are all left intact, this comes close to delivering a truly unusual and ear-popping radio experience. Intense, hard to follow, and in places quite abrasive in its sound quality and rough-hewn musical selections.

www.sublimefrequencies.com

NOISES FROM THE US ⚹UNDERGROUND⚹

Om

Conference of the Birds

USA HOLY MOUNTAIN 5OXF3LP LP (2006)

Great! Chris Hakius (drummer) and Al Cisneros (bass and voice) from the 1990s sludge-merchants Sleep now make good with their amazing duo act that swoops all the prizes for excellence. In place of Sleep's growly, sneery, sloppy noise-thrash, we have – in one word – precision. Clean, clear drumming, two-note song melodies, soaring bass notes. In fact each of these two songs (one per side!) is more like an extended incantation, a liturgy, with the same musical intervals you might associate with a Psalm. Honed to perfection as if born fully-armed from the head of Zeus – or perhaps the Egyptian God Thoth in this case would be more fitting – Om offer a brilliant 21st century update on Black Sabbath, King Crimson, Pink Floyd and other 1970s prog / metal greats in their sound, and enhance everything with their Avian-themed 'proggy' lyrics. Like a couple of vegan muscular Spartan athletes, this duo cut through the sludge with razor-sharp blades of steel. The simplicity and clarity of this approach may take you by surprise at first, especially if expecting more of the full-on attack of Sleep, but I guarantee that 2-3 spins later you'll be hooked and thoroughly convinced by this single-minded genius, its sure-footed progress as it clambers up a mountainside like an eight-legged goat! Mention must be made of the obsessive lyrics for 'At Giza' and 'Flight of the Eagle', which are fixated on birds and their universe, evoking the mysteries of flight, the ancient bird-gods, the transformation of man into a flying animal, all delivered with total trance-like conviction by Cisneros and his monotonous, chanting, liturgical voice. In fine he sings like a holy man possessed with his astounding visions of flight. All the above makes this LP a shamanistic, vibrational, meditational classic of modern rock. Recorded in California by Billy Anderson. Mark my words, this will be seen in years to come as an exceptionally important record. Get it on vinyl now!

ED PINSENT 21/10/2006

www.holymountain.com

The Psychic Paramount

Live 2002 at the Franco-Italian Tour

USA PUBLIC GUILT PG006 CD (2005)

CD of the month! The electrifying trio of Drew St Ivany, Ben Armstrong and Tatsuya Nakatani blat out six live recordings from their 2002 tour of Italy and France. Resulting CD is a total belter of heavy black rocking art-noise instrumentalism, wrought from guitars, bass and drums (and a luscious FX processing box, I would guess). Plenty of full-on pounding energy from the rhythm section and re-invented psychedelic pyrotechnic licks from the lead guitar. Like Aluk Todolo, this bunch seem to have rethought the conventions of the standard rock trio in order to incorporate magical and psychic elements somehow…perhaps using telepathy, pre-performance rituals, psychological games, specific diets and certain unknown invocations to get the desired results. They also harnessed the energy of chaos; it seems 'the performances of the tour were often chaotic and unpredictable, lent by a sense of urgency and chance elements'. Anything would make a welcome alternative to conventional bands 'paying their dues' on the traditional rock circuit, which conventional rock wisdom deems the only path to follow, trudging across unfriendly stages through sweat and tears and years of indifference.

I'm fully aware that these unusual avenues of enquiry in evidence on this live CD have been explored, for example, by the Fushitsusha trio ten years ago, in particular the notable effects of the specific dietary regime, but The Psychic Paramount have more immediacy somehow. The depth of preparation is audible in all the sounds they make, no matter how wild they may appear; this isn't empty thrashing. In fine, I maintain that sacred vegetable rites, drugs and spells have probably been used extensively by the trio to attain the necessary trance states of deprivation and delusion to aid them in the production of these energised, spiritualised episodes. I further believe they can pass on to the listener some form on mystical enlightenment, through the gift of pounding minimal rock. There is much conviction in every note, every sound on this disc. I was certain I could hear some backwards-taped post-production work on one of the early tracks, but maybe they can actually play their instruments backwards. Anything is possible with this unholy three. If the energetic protoplasm which they manifest so freely proves too much for you, then turn an ear to the melodic long-form extended guitar-note instrumentals, which you may find more of a balm. Particularly effective is the 11-minute fourth track, a highly dynamic exploratory piece indeed and one that's worthy of taking its place on the throne alongside any masterpiece of prog-rock or krautrock noodling. This track freely roams across several galaxies until it explodes at the end in a supernova of cosmic colours, to huge applause from the crowd. Fantastic CD which I recommend. It also includes a video element, extracts from a documentary film captured on the same tour of Europe. The core duo of Drew (guitar) and Ben (bass) used to play in Laddio Bolocko in New York City. They met the free improvising drummer Nakatani five days before the European tour, so in effect this is a document of a new thing being birthed, coming into being. Be sure to look out for their first release *Gamelan Into The Mink Supernatural* by this bunch on No Quarter records, which is also great.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2006

publicguilt@hotmail.com
www.thepsychicparamount.com
www.publicguilt.com

Magicicada

Everyone is Everyone

USA PUBLIC GUILT PG005 CD (2006)

Hugely enjoyable and great collection by this

mysterious solo artiste who may be Christopher White residing in Atlanta GA – nine brilliant sound assemblages, a combination of many methodologies and sound sources put together in very lively and unexpected bricolage-fashion. Magicicada is one of those rarities who has a rich and private sound-world, and successfully immerses the listener in it from the very start. Each episode is an example of semi-magical trance music, using lots of elements - musical instruments, found tapes, field recordings, scattered vocals, and collaborations; and unusual recording methods, including placement of microphones in unexpected areas, suggesting vertiginous gravity-defying sound-capture. Magicicada provides plenty evidence of bonding with nature and the wild outdoors with as much engagement as any disciple of Walt Whitman, but also dwelling in a private electro-acoustic shack of home-recording and tape reworking with the fanatical devotion of a Frank Zappa. Listeners will note the inviting title 'Everyone Is Everyone', an encouraging come-all-ye which suggests the possibility of omniscient knowledge to all who study the ways of Mother Earth and live by her rules. These composed sound-events meander like ghostly dreamers across the plenty of Nature, yet are also dense, elaborate and rich – accumulating variety like a rolling stone gathering lichens. Magicicada is the kind of person who will take a walk in the woods and fetch back 55 electronic goldfish, set them in a pool with digital carp, and watch the results.

Concocted with the help of fellow visionaries Trulle Grace Hall, Rob Clemens, Steve Brand (of Augur), and Bill Coonan, this is a splendid record top to toe; arrives in a carton decorated with images of a winged insect, woodlands, and tree branches as sharp as pitchforks. Its general trance-inducing droniness will please fans of Ben Reynolds, while the cluttered abstractedness resembles the sound-worlds of Biota; but the strongest comparison is with those two amazing records Andrew Deutsch made for Anomalous Records (*Field Tracker* and *Electronic Garden*). There's the same electrifying clashes of cultures (urban and pastoral) and elemental sounds (fire, earth and water). Listen to it in a sitting and note the gradual darkening in tone over the course of nine cuts. Two tracks, 'I demand my fucking cloud' and 'Turi' are especially macabre, both rich and dark as a joint of good beef.

Magicicada has been making music, sound design and photography since 1999; look for other releases on Sub:marine Records and Stickfigure Records, or any one of his own CDRs; best place to locate latter may be at the Atlanta branch of Tower Records, where he once upset the clerks who work there by putting 25 copies of one of his releases into the relevant avant-garde rack. You should have heard the resulting fireworks. But maybe we'll just settle for hearing this.

ED PINSENT 08/10/2006

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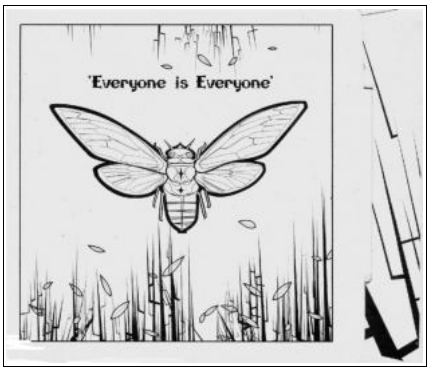
www.publicguilt.com
www.magicicada.com

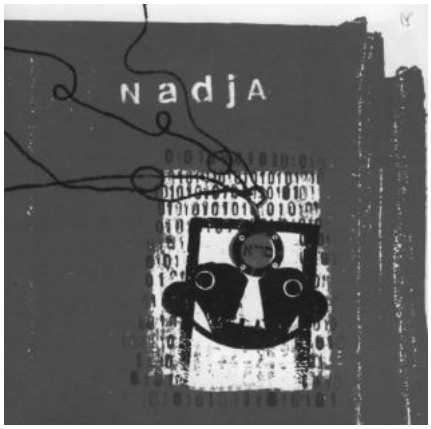
Nadja

Truth Becomes Death
CANADA ALIEN8 RECORDINGS ALIENCD58 CD (2005)

Righteous heaviosity abounding on this disc, perhaps one of my faves from 2005. My pen is



proving inadequate to capture the full glory of this widescreen, cinemascope sonic canvas of grandiosity…a true stoner-sludge 'art' statement! Created in the studio with basic instrumentation, probably with techniques such as slowing everything down, using multiple time-stretching processes, repeated loops, and overdubs to build up tons of layers, and a lot of distortion in the original recordings too. As layers accrete, this disc quickly morphs into an overloaded lumbering elephant in full body armour. Aidan Baker has crafted this dark invention using guitars, voices, flute, piano, and a drum machine. This Toronto musician and writer started Nadja (the name comes from a novel by surrealist Andre Breton) in 2003 as a solo project, but he is helped by bass player Leah Burkett for this release. Only Swans have



matched this grandiose, dense, slow and brutalist approach to modern rock. But fans of My Bloody Valentine, Sunn O))), and Corrupted will also find their home in these grooves. Nadja have achieved a massive, beautiful, thundering, menace all their own!

I was also intrigued by the inclusion of Hebrew texts on the cover artwork. This ties into the content of 'Bug / Golem', which refers to the Golem legend of Jewish lore. The lyrics depict the Golem at a critical stage in his life. The Aleph is embedded in his forehead, the very thing that gives him life; but the Aleph is now being levered out by a knife. At this crucial moment, 'truth becomes death' for him, and he will turn back into the pile of dust from which he was formed. With considerable poetic economy, this truth-or-death moment is likened to a similarly unbearable moment in a disintegrating relationship, here expressed as a penetrating look in the eyes from your loved one. Baker's literary skill merges two separate references into one, bringing these two on-the-edge scenarios together, and building an exquisite monument to melancholy, grief and loss. The tortured lyrical content here, barely whispered and mostly indecipherable, is engulfed by about 20 minutes of stupefying, overblown, and excessive tidal waves of guitar noise. How's that for pathetic fallacy?

Equally grand is 'Memory Leak', likewise slow, distorted and as massive as the Jurassic Coastline, but this piece has a gorgeous melancholy melody that'll have you weeping in sympathy; and the beautiful 'Breaking Point', which eventually resolves into a quieter, poetic, more conventional piece of songcraft, even though it's still packed with tricky studio modifications. A modest ending to what must be one of the most monumental underground records of last year – sumptuous, bizarre, incredible, and as heavy as a cannonball flying in slow motion across the battlefield.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2006

www.alien8recordings.com

Sightings

End Times
USA FUESTRON FUSE044 CD (2006)

Total scorcher of a CD from this unhinged US band, who've had releases on Load Records which every home should own. For Fusetron, they've turned in a monstrous warehouse full of intense and harsh guitar noise, power electronics, excessive amplification, and mangled shouty vocal shrieks, all the above often increased with reverb and other shocking effects. For radical rockin' mayhem and studio deconstruction ideas, this CD matches The Hospitals' last release on Load; but Sightings have more anger, more bad attitude, more raw ferocity in their attack. *End Times* is guaranteed to piss off everyone who listens to it, with its hatred, tension, ire, and its sheer bonkers power.

End Times is an appropriate message to begin the 21st century, a fine antidote to any well-wishers who see blue skies and smiles everywhere, and it confirms that Sightings are cosmic pessimists who see harbingers of doom and apocalypse everywhere they look, and not just in the daily news either. Try as they may to articulate their bad feelings in the half-formed titles, the music is mostly testament to their inarticulacy; each sound they make is a mini-symphony of blocked and frustrated howling, their every thought and action thwarted by forces unknown; track title 'Failure of Words' confirms this. This is a record that takes that spirit of helpless punk-rock sneering, that seemed so abrasive in 1976, and pounds it into a

new art form, raising the energy to a completely new level of dementia and one that's perfectly fitting for the prevailing zeitgeist. Said zeitgeist is also discernible in the cover art, depicting Western civilisation as a grotesque and disorganised circus, and one that is failing very badly in spite of the apparent gaiety. Hideous clowns form grimaces among the chaos; a dog dies with its paws in the air. Yet the circus parade goes on. A perfect summation of mankind's current predicament, if you ask me. Totally lovely release.

ED PINSENT 22/10/2006

www.fusetronsound.com

mudboy

This is Folk Music

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 092 CD (2006)

Like this release very much; unsure what to expect and received pleasant surprise when it turned out to be a set of quirky instrumentals played on the organ, one of my favourite instruments. mudboy plays many of these quaint tunes in ¾ time and exhibits a good grasp of melodic invention, if not radical chord structure. Very krautrocky; think of Harmonia, Cluster or Kraftwerk, but with an indefinably subtle tinge of gothic nightmare thrown in. This suggestion may come from the interior image, where among cut-up images of various keyboards collaged into layers depicting an impossible but gloriously complex musical instrument, there lurks the shadow of a caped organist like the phantom of the opera, or perhaps an ectoplasmic manifestation of Captain Nemo. As I enjoy the jolly tunes (even if I can't say every single cut is a gem), I can't reconcile what I hear with the image of mudboy on the front cover, where he stands in the woods wearing only a pair of shorts, and resembles a feral youth or member of a radical protest group willing to sacrifice human life in order to save a single tree. He seems to be something of an obscurantist and highly eccentric figure, describing himself as a 'Doctor of Experimental Organomics'. Originally issued, presumably in minute quantities, on certain obscure private press labels, to wit FM4TB and Breaking World Records; recorded in Rhode Island with the help of Eric Carlson (ie Area C). 12 tracks, although three of them are very short and may even be completely silent programmes.

ED PINSENT 11/07/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

mudboy is interviewed this issue.

Hall / Ranaldo / Hooker

Oasis of Whispers

CANADA ALIEN8 RECORDINGS ALIENCD59 CD (2005)

A lugubrious, spooked atmosphere haunts each track on this post-modern jazz-noise construct. William Hooker drums in his matchless free style. Canadian jazzer Glen Hall does much blowing on tenor and soprano sax, flute, piccolo, bass clarinet and more. Lee Ranaldo adds strange backdrops to every episode, either droning on a noisy electric guitar or flinging out ingenious segments of prepared audio collages, most effectively on 'Conference Call' for example, which comprises a babel of fragmented telephone voices. At first I thought the jazz players would dominate this disc, but they don't, and Hall's unusual contributions are a free melange of elements swiped from post-bop, free jazz, big band, small 1950s combos, and so forth. If you were expecting wild Ascension-styled freakouts, best to look elsewhere. The gloomy pallor is not in the recording (which is extremely vivid and clear), but rather in the furrowed brows of all those playing. It was a live recording made in a studio in Buffalo NY, from 2001. Given that the date was in September of that year, this work may have been unspooling in the shadow of the twin towers disaster. A poetic and melancholic weirdie, with more than a hint of madness lurking in those paranoid and disconnected voice samples, or in the strange urgent voices that randomly jump in between Glen Hall's intakes of breath, or the suggestive title 'View from Bellevue'...straitjackets should be standard issue for all listeners. Black and blue cover artwork adds to the minus-zero chill factor hereon. A good one.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2006

www.alien8recordings.com

Idea Fire Company

Vital

USA SWILL RADIO SWILL 025 CD (2006)

Fine selection of rare live recordings, resulting from Idea Fire Company's March 2006 European tour, organised with the help of the good people in Belgium who administer the K-RAA-K Festival. The IFCO quartet version which existed and performed in America is not here; rather it's the core duo of Karla Borecky and Scott Foust, joined for the occasion by Frans de Waard. Five instances of great instrumental music, from venues in Rotterdam, Bremen and Hasselt, are performed with extremely minimal equipment – including one small digital keyboard and a radio-tape player with an echo unit. Outside of one or two live tapes of IFCO and Tart, we've heard mainly studio recordings from Foust's projects; I think what comes over strongest on these live cuts is something about the danger of doing it live, taking the risk of

improvising something that might not work (even when working from minimal pre-arranged compositions), and celebrating the payoff when it succeeds so dazzlingly well. A slight nervousness is detectable on these recordings; and on the front cover photograph, neither husband nor wife looks totally comfortable, hunched in their tense and angular positions over the equipment perched on a trestle table. Foust himself describes this release as exhibiting 'an almost desperate muscularity'.

Muscularity also delivers a punch, however. Of the five tracks, the CD contains three certified knockout gems – these are sandwiched by two versions of a tune called 'Pleasure Cruise', which interestingly enough are so different from each other as to be almost unrecognisable. The first 'Pleasure Cruise' opens the CD and comes across as slightly clunky to these ears – Borecky deploying her percussive synth style in a somewhat relentless keyboard pattern that could perhaps have been executed more efficiently with a sequencer. Foust adds layers of radio noise, and the whole cruise puts into harbour with a bump and a scrape after a rather stormy ride at sea. The second version which closes the CD is arguably much better. It's virtually Kraftwerk meeting 'Hymnen', by way of Asmus Tietchens; just the right combination of the sweet and the sour, which makes IFCO such a solid proposition. The basic rhythm track is performed this time with a squelchier synth sound, and at a less frantic pace; now it perfectly approximates the Kraftwerk approach, and conveys the stately air of a grand cruise on a luxury yacht. Meanwhile, Scott's radio sounds and noisy drop-ins suggest something's seriously wrong on board, something verging on apocalyptic chaos. Nautical imagery crops up

now and again in Swill Radio projects; Tart's *Bring in The Admiral* LP seemed to be likening the major world powers to defeated naval officers on board a sinking ship, while a recent live performance on DVD with Chris Corsano (as The Braces) had Foust shouting 'Abandon ship! Abandon ship!' at the top of his voice.

'Hanging', track three, is my personal fave on this CD, a mysterious and opaque construct made of hissing, clunking synth noises like a psychedelic malfunctioning radiator bellowing out clouds of multi-coloured steam. Here, Foust adds faded extracts from his extensive collection of German Lieder (a Nazi-era mode of light classical chamber song which is of interest only to collectors). 'Hanging' scores high on the intellectually perplexing stakes and shades somewhat into the turf mapped out by Graham Lambkin on his *Draining The Vats* tape. 'Pour HG' is a gorgeous 'throbber' of electronic music, using a seemingly intuitive pattern of basic synth sounds, once again given added texture by Foust's subtle use of tapes, radio excerpts, and overall grainy sonic patina. It's a hypnotic piece of minimal-maximalism! Finally, there's 'Cycle 19', a superb and confident minimal electronic drone and phasing piece conveying endless shimmering movement, light and dance, and one that somehow connects back to IFCO's very earliest exploratory releases such as *Explosion In a Shingle Factory*.

I think this is the second release in CD format on this label, which held fast to its ideals about the superiority of vinyl for as long as possible, until faced with the inexorable collapse of affordable pressing plant facilities; a disaster which has affected numerous independent labels. However, this release not only sounds excellent, but it's also made the most of the digipack format, using it to display some characteristically enigmatic photographs fetched back from this European tour.

ED PINSENT 22/11/2006

www.anti-naturals.org/swill/

Jane

Coconuts

USA PSYCH-O-PATH RECORDS psp-012 CDR (2005)

Low-key and lo-fi bout of beat-box / electronics / vocal and turntable malarkey from this duo of NYC youngsters. Jane very much resemble a 1980s cassette band, with their 'bedroom' sound quality, their klunky electronics set-up, their languid amateurish approach. Noah Lennox mostly sings, DJ Scott Mou mostly operates turntable, keyboard and mixer; Noah is also in Animal Collective, where he calls himself Panda

Bear. When the two first met in 2002, they started making music immediately and this CD is the fruit of their labours, two 25-minute live workouts, previously released on a limited CDR. I do find this pleasant to listen to and it retains a certain appeal despite the ramshackle amateurishness. I guess this duo would love to have been active during a certain late-1970s period of crude electronics and vocal noise-rock, but Dr Mix and The Remix it ain't! In fact the title track is positively wispy – it puts plunky beats and half-assed loops behind the watery non-musical vocalising of Lennox, which is so dainty and ineffectual it's like hearing a choirgirl perform at some prissy Boston temperance party. Track two, 'Ossie', is slightly more – erm – experimental in that there's less of an attempted tune to while away the minutes, but compensations abound in the fizzy noises and liberal use of echo to create corny 'cosmic' sounds, like a plastic toy version of Tangerine Dream. In a black-and-white 'embossed' cover made by Jonas Asher of U W Owl, plus photocopy insert, this marginal release has charm but somehow lacks the raw grit of earlier releases on this label.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2006

www.psych-o-path.com

Davenport

Free Country

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 078 CD (2005)

Their eponymous LP impressed me deeply (see *Vinyl Viands 2006*), so how glad I was to receive this LVD compilation of recordings made between 2002-2005, some of which have been previously issued as limited CDRs on the Foxglove label. Their title *Free Country* may either be making a sarcastic world-weary comment on the political state of the USA today, or constitute a proposal for a new genre of music, one which crosses free improv and free jazz with country and western, although Eugene Chadbourne has already staked out that territory long ago...actually what we have here is strange blends of 'ritualised' droning acoustic folk-music, plus at least one version of an old obscure (and very morbid) US folk song, and certain improvisations which have been layered together with playbacks of old 78 recordings of gospel, blues and early US folk. Truly, Davenport leader Clay Ruby is not ignorant of his home country's musical heritage, and can deploy his knowledge to help further the musical aims of the collective. That said, the early Krautrock collective Amon Düül are also namechecked on one track, and with good cause. This collection does start to acquire a certain 'visionary' quality as it unspools its hypnotic chants and trance-pieces, and you'll find every other song is laced with themes of death and despondency.

Mostly performed and conceived by Clay Ruby with his keyboards, electronics, guitar, percussion and singing voice, with the help of many friends and collaborators including regulars Nic Stage and Karen Eliot. The cover photos show the players (if it is they) as much at home at the edge of the ocean as they are hidden in a secret red interior enclave, stooped in hunching positions to wrench out these gobbets of murky, pain-filled music from their complex inner beings. On the pieces where everyone sings, there is a touch of The Tower Recordings in the resulting ill-matched non-musical harmonies and the keening, wailing qualities of their feral voices. Davenport's ugly half-formed chants are useful for warding off death and other unknown qualities. Track titles include 'Hymn to Broken Neck Bone', 'Thou shall be waking', and nine more. The front cover shows a cow's skull hidden among sickly psychedelic swirls. Davenport still seem to be preoccupied with the Bone Orchard, as on the previous LP, and though this one may not be as urgent or blackly resonant as that release, *Free Country* has an enduring murmuring, faded and distorted charm which I like muchly.

ED PINSENT 29/07/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

Clay Ruby is interviewed this issue.

Drift Yellow Swans

Drift Yellow Swans

SPAIN ACURAEA NOI5054 CD (2006)

I continue to purchase whatever Yellow Swans product comes my way, following my enthusiastic 'discovery' of their work in 2005 (see last issue), and have yet to be disappointed by anything, except perhaps the niggardly, under-nourished packaging of certain CDs. Here, the duo of GMS and Pete Swanson are noising it up in a slightly more subtle mode than I've heard so far – no rip-roaring drum machine attacks or harsh noise-guitar on these three cuts from 2004, just poisonous electronic vapourings which totally emanate death, menace, and brooding horror. Try and imagine a reverso-Tangerine Dream. Where Edgar Froese and his crew would dreamily discover new worlds as they travelled the universe in their benevolent

space-craft, Yellow Swans travel in fast-moving attack craft equipped with lasers, and would rather destroy those worlds, leaving scorched earth and poisoned atmospheres wherever they go. Trancey, gritty, feedback-rich metallic noise pours from their cheap and nasty instruments like shards of grapeshot from cannons, while you (wounded in the chest) stagger and gasp for breath, only to draw in a lungful of iron filings. It's not all hostility and aggression, though; I might almost stick my neck out and say that Yellow Swans are aiming for a more subtle, rich depth of content than the Wolf Eyes / Hair Police / Dead Machines gang, if that's at all possible in this realm. A real grower!

ED PINSENT 08/08/2006

www.acuareladiscos.com

Las Malas Amistades

Jardin Interior

USA PSYCH-O-PATH RECORDS PSP-013 CD (2005)

Totally brilliant collection of 18 short songs and instrumentals from this underground Colombian collective. There seem to be at least 10 players, but don't expect a 'huge' big-band sound, as there's only about two instruments and one voice showcased per selection, and the production is stark and stripped-back. The band play mostly guitars and other stringed instruments, sometimes with percussion but also (interestingly) minimal electronica, drum machines, and electric organ. Already that's a pleasing combination that you will find tough to resist. But then there's the singers – male and female vocalists pitch in, state their case in song with direct simplicity, and have done with it. Not sure what their lyrics are about (sung in Spanish?), but even a nudnik like myself can hear that they get their effects through repetition of very simple phrases. All of this music has passion, naïve charm, and a beautiful simplicity that has led the label to find parallels with 'post-punk' music (Young Marble Giants) and demented underground collectives like Maher Shalal Hash Baz. The result is a sparkling collection of quirky charm that will have you happily bobbing about like a rubber duck in the bathtub, and you'll play it through every time.

The band seems to have developed from a local scene fermenting among enthusiastic youngsters at University in Colombia in 1994. Art students and film-makers started off by holding informal jam sessions of spontaneous music, which led to the development of songs, said songs then being recorded on a four-track. Besides the above indie-rock influences, the musicians also collected kitschy-records by Spanish easy-listening singers of the 1960s and 1970s, and tropical music by Joe Arroyo, and soundtrack music by Morricone and Nyman. But they also dipped into the conceptual trashcan of the Fluxus scene and something called the 'Brazilian Anthropophagist avant-garde'. Besides this infectious music, the most admirable thing about Las Malas Amistades is their anonymity, their modest claim that 'they wanted to change their world while remaining faceless'. That said, we have at least one 'name' to pin them down – the 'original member' Manuel Kalmanovitz Gonzalez, who did the cover art and layout for the CD. Now scattered throughout North and South America, Las Malas Amistades meet up only occasionally in their native Bogota high up in the

mountains of that tropical zone, where they celebrate and make music. This CD is the latest document of such meetings. We look forward eagerly to the next.

ED PINSENT 26/07/2006

www.psych-o-path.com
www.malasamistades.com

PSI

oo-ee-oo (burnt offering)

USA EVOLVING EAR ee15 CD (2006)

A great 31-minute live recording by this Brooklyn combo, mostly acoustic music and recorded at cassette-quality fidelity. Documents one single 'jam' session by the guys and strikes me as totally unlike their last release I heard which was a sprawling and bizarre compilation of many aspects of their varied approaches to baffling audiences – wild noise attacks, mysteriously quiet improvisations in deserted warehouses, and perplexing tape assemblages. (This reflects the band's 'habit of severely altering their total sonic impressions with each release'). This record conversely is just realised in a single take using acoustic guitars, low-key cheap organ, percussion, and mad vocal wailings, all from the core PSI trio of Jaime Fennelly, Chris Forsyth and Fritz Welch, who did it somewhere in New Jersey in 2005. For a long time they strum, moan, and drone like any undiscovered hippie-commune collective from 1969 armed with guitars and drums and large blocks of hashish, hiding in a rural barn. Then about halfway through PSI slow it all down, bringing the collective three-seater motorbike to a stalled position from which they have to kick-start it, using sharp smacking-thwacks against the sides of their instruments, thus allowing normal business to resume. We're hearing improvised music in the raw, where those involved really are making tough decisions and experimenting, rather than following pre-planned courses, and even the mistakes and diversions are left in the finished unedited item. This makes for a very exciting experience. This record is evidence of a tribal collective urban workout and the music they make is full of unexpected turns and twists, while the slightly muffled aura adds enormously to the grooviness of the trippy sounds. The digipack cover shows a colour clipping from a furniture catalogue, an image whose banality is transformed and made menacing by the simple addition of the band's semi-magical sigil. A black and white photo insert seems to convey something of the circumstances of the music's creation: a cramped, secret, poorly-lit urban space, a makeshift ceremony taking place before a tiny bewildered audience. Or perhaps not; press release suggests rather that 'this live recording was made while the group was locked blindfolded and incapable of compassionate intolerance in a dank and noise-damaged basement in central New Jersey.' And if I believe that, I'll believe anything. Fine stuff.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2006

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PSI

Commuting Between the Surface and the Underworld

USA EVOLVING EAR EE18 CD (2006)

Hiding inside a package which is awash with mixed messages and strange satirical barbs is yet another pack of bizarre and unpredictable noise-music from these versatile and varied NYC weirdoes. Compared to the 2005 release which was noisy, bitty and disjointed, we've got a lot more electric and acoustic guitars, and a very convincing full band sound from the core members Jaime Fennelly, Chris Forsyth and Fritz Welch, supplemented with added instrumentation from Clare Cooper on harp, Nate Wooley and his horns, and a vocal duo contributing to the last track. Did I say convincing? I mean it's totally skewed!

The opening track alone should frazzle your brain with its twisted stone groove – it's another version of 'oo-ee-oo', this one recorded in a studio, and comprising an acoustic guitar and organ workout locked together in a solid rhythm that totally delivers on the freak-groove Krautrock promise, while the snarling vocals bark themselves into a corner as the barker

reaches a frenzy of madness. This one should earn them plenty of Sun City Girls comparisons! On 'Ballad of Fine Decay' the macabre tone is set by a relentless minor-key acoustic guitar and some manic percussion, creating a mood of panic and despair only slightly sweetened by the lustrous harp of Clare Cooper. Then there's 'Stay Positive, Asshole', a title which, to me, conveys the sense of a motivational speaker who also loves to insult his charges while he stabs them in both eyes with a dagger; all of which is conveyed by the troubling music. This, one of the most anguished cuts on a fairly jarring record, puts discordant jamming guitars against a anxious organ drone and plenty of unidentifiable 'foreign bodies' of sound, while the percussion delivers brutal smashes and body blows. Just chock-full of tension – this record won't please all listeners!

The voice choir, comprising Shawn Edward Hansen and Josh Clark, appear on 'Distant Mud', the final disconcerting piece which includes a poem about the devil (he is the evil one who commutes between the surface and the underworld), rendered as a horrid chant by the massed voices. To portray this sense of unwanted and unseen diabolical invasion, there are more worrying chords picked out by spider-fingers on acoustic guitars, plus scraping metal, fizzing electronic soup, and a relentless aura of moaning discomfort. This suggestion of an 'evil empire' is further hinted at by the cover art, which features men dressed in black and standing in a defiant head-on pose not unlike that seen in Iran hostage videos. But they are holding incongruous objects, and it's all rendered as vaguely wacky surrealism. Cuts close to the bone, much like the music with its many unsettling sounds and sub-currents.

ED PINSENT 08/10/2006

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Residual Echoes

Phoenician Flu and Ancient Ocean

USA HOLY MOUNTAIN 90156 CD (2005)

Excellent collection of lively, noisy free avant-rock from these West Coast (Portland and California) musicians rocking it up in untamed style. Residual Echoes are among the current crop of US musicians showing noticeable influence from the Japanese PSF 'boom' of the 1990s (and I have Rik Rawling to thank for this observation, which I find to be quite accurate) ... in this case, 'Lorelei' could almost be a pastiche of Les Rallizes Denudes, by way of White Heaven – even down to the strung-out, washed-out qualities of the vocals. Of course, the Japanese bands from that time were borrowing heavily from the 1970s and earlier, as they reincarnated heavy rock, psychedelic music and prog in their own long-haired image...Residual Echoes may namecheck Comets On Fire on their sleeve, but you can bet that High Rise, Musica Transonic and Fushitsusha are on their decks. [1]

Even so, this CD still clobbers a lot of the current competition when it comes to meeting your high-energy full-power rock requirements (as do not a few recent releases on this label – Mammatus for one). They achieve a total stoner acid-drenched guitar sound to die for, an amazing drum sound (on track 3), and the four-piece of musicians (guitars, bass, percussion, occasional piano and synth) exhibit what I can only describe as 'hairiness' and looseness in their playing. For the most part, that is – 'Motametrk Canopy Entry' (near the end of the disc) is very sluggish, yet it still builds to a powerful psychedelic flash-o-rama finale. The fourth track (whose title is ambiguous and probably not easy to represent in print) is also less manic in pace than the rest of this powerful blaster, although it still has a terrific cluttered arrangement, whose main elements are piano, percussion, and a rather scary denatured trumpet, as it shuffles along summoning up an ethereal trance state.

Given the hints dropped by the bizarre titles and cover artworks (which include images of a floating head and an insane-looking feline beast), it's not wide of the mark to peg these fellows as informed and well-read lovers of esoterica and obscure antiquities. I feel confirmed in this view by the indistinct vocals, which are proudly advertised as 'mumbled' and are probably concealing arcane alchemical secrets within every muttered syllable. And the studio production adds a dimension of gnostic weirdness, even if said quality does not always exist in the music. Some of this desirable commodity may be down to Steven Wray Lobdell, who engineered some tracks; he records for this label under his own name and (with friends) as Davis Redford Triad, and who brings many touches of dementia to every project he touches. The clearest realisation of this aspect of Residual Echoes lies, oddly enough, not in the group pieces but in 'Greetings Ancient Ocean', which is a short solo work by Adam, a gorgeous miniature of acoustic guitar and reverb which sparkles like a tiny engraving in a 17th century book of emblems.

ED PINSENT 27/07/2006

www.holymountain.com

Sun City Girls

Carnival Folklore Resurrection 14: Static from the Outside Set

USA ABDUCTION RECORDS ABDT035 CD (2006)

14th instalment in the endless 'Carnival Folklore Resurrection' series, this turns out to be a radio show originally put together for BBC Radio in Lancashire, and aired on Steve Barker's 'On The Wire' show. Barker himself is a musical savant of such awesome dimensions that it's amazing no-one ever sees fit to mention him alongside John Peel; he's often been highly adventurous for the BBC, and sponsoring this spicy hotcake is one such example of his courage. Assembled from SCG archive material and subtitled 'Static from the outside set', this disc is a 60-minute broadcast from Hell, going all-out to disorient the listener with its non-stop barrage of information and music…genuine radio news and commercials are cut-up and spliced in among the

1 John Whitson writes: 'Don't you think that you overuse the Mainliner / Musica Transonic comparison? Narita from High Rise is a way more interesting player-probably because you don't hear every thing he does. The other thing that "ruins" Musica Transonic is Yoshida-is there a note that he doesn't want play? As a survivor of bad prog, I thought you'd be hip to the hate.'

original SCG material, which comprises live music, 'ethnic' tapes, crazy songs and faked programme spots. The latter spoofs and hoaxes are executed by Charles Gocher, wherein he does all the voices and sucks you into the most outrageous and obscene scenarios (for example the supposed 'menace' of cannibalism facing vulnerable young people in the US), never once missing a beat as he keeps up his stream of wildly-implausible (and offensive) drivel with a totally convincing delivery. What must it have been like to hear this filth pouring out of BBC radio live?

Personally, there's more than enough of the latter sort of material for me on this CD, even if it is devastatingly cruel in its satire, but the musical segments are great; they include wild guitar jams, fake lounge jazz piano spots, sarcastic versions of harmony-vocal songs, an old R&B classic 'Gimme That Wine' rendered with side-splitting gusto, and a notorious version of 'Gently Johnny' from *The Wicker Man* soundtrack. Never ones to miss a single opportunity for 'spicing up' an original, this SCG version not only contains improved and weirded-out lyrics alluding to transvestites and androgynes, but they even remember to include, word-perfect, Christopher Lee's spontaneous but apt quotation of a Walt Whitman poem (which only appeared in the full uncut version of the movie). Now, how many cultural buttons does that push in the space of five minutes?

Faint-hearts should beware and steer clear of this abnormal record; its triple-strength weirdness can cause fainting spells in some listeners. Fans of William Burroughs, Henry Miller, Thomas Pynchon et al will have a field day however. Like them, Sun City Girls exasperate as much as they delight, consistently managing to produce music and sounds both tenderly beautiful and sneeringly bitter, often within the space of a single minute. They are genuine US originals of LSD-influenced, maverick, well-informed, hyper-intelligent craziness.

ED PINSENT 09/10/2006

Info1@sublimefrequencies.com
www.suncitygirls.com

Zdrastvootie

2

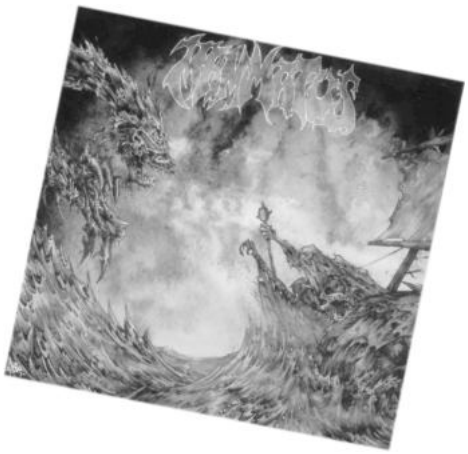
USA HOLY MOUNTAIN 43109 CD (2005)

A new set of twisted art-rock songs and guitar-based instrumentals from this Californian foursome. A follow-up to their eponymous LP for this label, and here they show some improvements on that release (which was a little hesitant in places, and somewhat under-produced). Everything about this bunch is slightly awkward, from a band name which you can't pronounce to a style of playing that defies common sense and makes it difficult for your ears to get a purchase. They obstinately refuse to rock out, no lazy barrel-house boogie jams for this gang, and instead they demonstrate a fluency in odd time-signatures, fast-moving and very dramatic dynamics, weird chord structures, off-beat instrumentation, briefly 'atonal' passages of free playing, and an overall approach to playing the guitar which we can only describe as 'angular'. A much-used word in this context I know, but Drew Adams is so angular on his approach to guitar-playing that he must use a set square instead of a plectrum. All of the above tends to align Zdrastvootie with prog greats like King Crimson or Magma rather than with any band in the contemporary art-rock scene, but they convincingly occupy their own space. Sean Adams, Scott Stobbe, and Ben Pearce are the other members providing bass, drums and rhythm guitar support, but Drew is the mainstay guitar player and adds other visionary instrumentation touches using voice, dulcimer, keyboards, and samples from CDs and old 78 records. There's also some very pleasing and plangent discordant piano contributions from guest player Thollem McDonas which I would place on a par with Mike Garson's work for David Bowie in the 1970s. One shouldn't confuse this with the 'piano notes' contributed by Drew to the oddly haunting track 'Peace Fugue', which also boasts lovely sound effects and a slightly calmer tone to the rest of the CD, which gets quite hectic.

The singing style of Zdrastvootie is kind of odd too, one of the most 'mannered' aspects of their sound; even if sung in English, it somehow appears not to be. The delivery and the recording both mitigate against your understanding the exact sense, yet something deeper and mysterious is still communicated this way. I'd hesitate to call these 'operatic' vocals, but they come close to the sort of stridency and pomposity which I assume can be found in any given Andrew Lloyd Webber monstrosity currently playing in the West End; of course Zdrastvootie have a much more twisted take on it than that. It could be that Zdrastvootie don't have much to say in the form of lyrics, except by using them to add further exotic weirdness and distancing effects to a package already overloaded with alienation. They aren't quite up there with the other Holy Mountain mystics, but they try very hard. Arrives with an arty oil painting on the cover depicting 'Three Muses'.

ED PINSENT 25/07/2006

www.holymountain.com



Mammatus

Mammatus

USA HOLY MOUNTAIN 17974 CD (2006) (Licensed from UK ROCKET RECORDINGS CD Launch 025)

Oughta plug many a yearning for Ye Olde Time proggy 1960s hard rock and Kosmische Musik among some TSP readers. Mammatus hail from Corralitos in California and this is their debut album. From start to finish, it's enthusiastic mostly instrumental guitars-n-drums music with a whole lotta strong bassy riffing that betrays influences from doom metal and stoner rock, particularly on track three and about the halfway mark of track four where everything quietens down to a single compressed moment which then gradually unfolds through a series of minimalist riffs. Mammatus's actual sound isn't really anything out of the ordinary, not washed-out or fuzzed-up or distorted in any way, rather clean and a bit on the thin side which tends to emphasise the rhythm section's contributions, so we have to focus on what the musicians are doing which is playing their hearts out and creating a massive monster. Everything is kept tight and fairly lean, and all is kept moving forwards all the time with no pause for guitar or drum solos that would bog down the music.

There is singing but it's very much in the background and sounds as if it's coming through a distant megaphone. Dare I say that I wish famous bands of the late 60s - 70s like Led Zeppelin could have played more the Mammatus way, concentrating on strong rhythms and riffs to create particular moods and build up momentum? Oh yes, I forgot: many passages in this recording are very reminiscent of early 70s Amon Düül II around their *Yeti* and *Tanz der Lemminge* releases and surely if the ex-AD2 members were to hear this album, their eyes would fill with tears and their hearts with gladness that this music never really went away.

Very colourful and suitable heroic / bombastic / mythical proggy art features on the CD sleeve (a knowing pastiche of Roger Dean's work, unless I miss my guess – Ed.): I'm reminded of an English-language prose version I once read of the Finnish epic 'Kalevala', especially that part where hero Vainamoinen battles the witch Old Louhi trying to reclaim a valuable salt mill he stole from her (she actually fights him in the form of an eagle, not a sea dragon as depicted on the cover). The titles of the four tracks too refer to a mythical set-up imagined by the band and if the lyrics were more up-front in the mix and a bit less distorted, they too would allude to a fantastic story.

JENNIFER HOR

www.holymountain.com

Fursaxa

Amulet

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 101 CD (2005)

This Fursaxa record very much resembles the music of Popol Vuh throughout; there's the same aspiration to religious ceremony and ritual, including hymnal chants and processional march music. Florian Fricke was I think originally inspired by aspects of the Mayan religion, but his music arrived at something so universal that it embodied and embraced all world's religions, and all of mankind's spirituality. Fursaxa may not have quite the same far-reaching ambitions, but like Popol Vuh their music certainly contains lots of voices – where the singers, chanters and declaimers are joyful, serious, uncertain and unorthodox, but always seized with the same sort of passionate holy fervour. They also use minimal percussion, electronic organ, and strumming guitars, and in their simplistic trance-pieces they have no fear whatsoever of monotony or repetition – indeed, it's a given

that this fundament will be the central core of each piece, necessary for the tribe to achieve that shared Nirvana. Recorded in various locations across New England USA during 2002-04, with some selections previously issued as *The Cult From Moon Mountain* (and what an evocative title that is, and doesn't the music just live up to it!). The sleeve includes dazzling artworks, fragile and delicate paintings superimposing animals, birds and Ancient Egyptian magicians and high priests in a time-travelling picture frame, all living creatures reckoned as participants in unknown ceremonies, or key players in the cosmic dance of life. Includes 'Rodeo in the Sky' and 'Song to the Cicada', both titles which root the authors in North American mythologies, but also hint at their respect for the natural world. To be honest, the performances of this bunch are pretty shaky throughout this patchy collection, but there is no denying their conviction – and that compensates for a lot!

ED PINSENT 08/08/2006

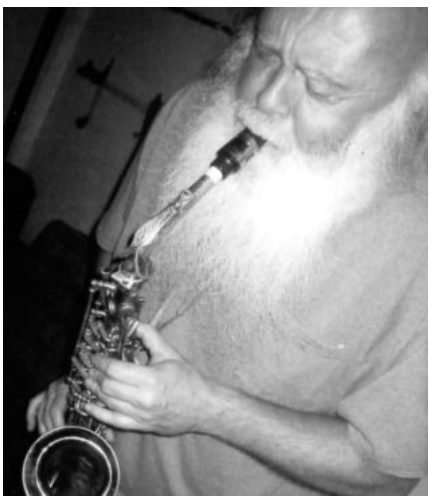
www.lastvisibledog.com

Paul Flaherty / Chris Corsano

The Beloved Music

USA FAMILY VINEYARD FV39 CD (2006)

Fantastic follow-up to *The Hated Music*, that epochal jazz release that boasted Gary Panter cover art and a Byron Coley sleeve-note yarn about how one minute of the music whereon could have been used to kill a thousand puritans...this blistering set carries on in like



manner, features two skulls eyeballing each other with their empty sockets on the cover and thus could be mistaken for a Blue Öyster Cult LP visually, and some form of heavy-metal jazz acoustically....it's first-class aggressive free improvised music which follows closely in many free jazz precedents, but updates that 1960s style for the cynical, blinkered ears of 21st century man. This magazine has never had an unkind word for Paul Flaherty, that white-bearded visionary blaster on the saxophones and local hero in his part of USA, nor for the skinny bop of hard-wired youngster Corsano whose many modes of drumming in contexts from rock to noise to trance to jazz are justly proven, and the man who can make a drum kit roll upwards the slope of a hill just with one blow of his wings. Vast amounts of their high-energy and highly sympathetic playing are poured into the grooves and cover the length and breadth of this disc over three long tracks like so much wallpaper paste, and they pasted it up together in Louisville Kentucky in New England. You won't often hear so much drama, power, and sheer life-affirming verve packed into 42 minutes, not even if you work for a Federal Department in the US Government.

Corsano the drummer as time goes on manifests his exciting talent in subtler ways, proving he has as much variety in his golden arms as Red Skelton once had in his whole scrawny neck. Thumping power can exude from the trip-wire feet of Corsano like exploding grenades in a war zone, yet check out the quieter opening passages of percussive fondling he's turning in on 'A Lean and Tortured Heart' on this red-hot disc, applying his rolls, scrapes and rattling with the subtlety of an English gentleman buttering his breakfast toast, and sounding much like an animated skeleton rattling his bones as he climbs out from a dank tomb on a moonlit night. Chris also manages to fill-in for a missing double bass with his tuned drums, creating melodic patterns (very simple ones) on the toms and bass drum that make the very suggestion of a conventional jazz trio a totally laughable concept in present context.

As to Mr Flaherty: he practically plays every note with an audible American accent. He's never had a 'clean' tone on any record I've heard him squonking on, and he's damn proud of that lack of personal hygiene. He can't let a single passage pass from his lips without adding a dirty rasp, a vibrato, an overblow, or a wild whoop of some sort. Jazz spoken here – it's his first language. His phrases can develop into nagging, sawing, expressions – like some cantankerous old git he can't let the point go – and if there's any backtalk from the listener, you young whippersnapper, he growls at you menacingly. Then the next moment he's as sweet as an old darling, piping a tasty melody from his lips that Duke Ellington wouldn't have kicked out of his silk-sheeted bed.

Special praise for 'What do you mean this is a dry county?', an expository title which is another in a series of examples that I associate with Flaherty's surly, fight-picking demeanour, as he ranges around the Connecticut underground from bar to bar living the Hemingway lifestyle. Great duo dynamics on this cut; punchy, fast-talking and fast moving blat and blurt it be. Sax screams and gets more hysterical as its owner is denied alcoholic relief; drummer proceeds to take on all comers, boasting he can lick any man in the house as the bar-brawl gets outta control.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2006

Also out: *Whirl of Nothingness* (FV43 CD), a fine solo collection of Flaherty blowing on the alto and tenor saxes, from our good friends at Family Vineyard. On it, his work takes a somewhat dark turn over eight improvisations themed around 'pain and suffering....heartbreak and misery...' and dedicates the CD 'to all the victims yet to come'. It seems to have all poured out of him on one miserable night in February, when the melancholy inside him was so strong he simply could not contain it.

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Various

Mitten (State) Transmissions

USA WHFR / TOP QUALITY ROCK & ROLL TQR&R 020 4 x CD (2005)

Splendid four CD set of edgy, urgent noise which was assembled by a local radio station in the state of Michigan, WHFR.FM 89.3, which broadcasts in the Dearborn and Detroit areas. Unwittingly perhaps they've ended up issuing a snapshot / survey of the Michigan 'noise' scene', which may possibly be thriving in many exciting ways, but has previously been the preserve of insider weblogs and CDR trading – unless of course you already live in the area and are experiencing it first-hand. My understanding is that Detroit has been suffering severe urban problems for decades since the mid1960s, caused by things like mass unemployment, car factory layoffs, racial tensions, and a general migration to the suburbs, leaving vast voids of desolation and decay in the town centre. It seems the situation may have improved in the last few years as Detroit has been host to a couple of major sporting events. For further insights, check any collection of Lloyd Dangle's *Troubletown* comic.

Most of the musicians here are still suffering from the effects of the desolation and decay, however. In their calendar, it's still 1995; hard to find a single track in this sprawling four-hour electronic swampland that doesn't reek of urban terror, even when the reactions to that threat can vary. Many respond to it with one degree or another of shrieking noise, either as a form of retaliation (shouting back and railing against the bleak powers of oppression) or as a form of imitation (sirens, factory floors, traffic) of their surroundings. Some accept it all with a resigned weariness, even finding some sort of beauty in the grime as they paint their moody, ambient soundscapes. Others still have retreated into madness, and offer crazed sound-works that are conducted in a private language, or simply suggest the entire state is a zone of absurdity.

There's an enormous number of musicians represented here and I find it difficult to single out names or individual contributions; all are equally

strong. The main value to be had is to listen to as much of the collection as you can in a single sitting (although you'll find that difficult, due to sheer intensity of sound and the quantities of bitterness and gloom imbued in many tracks), and note the cumulative effects. It amounts to a very unflattering portrait of contemporary urban life in the developed Western world, and conveys a lot of radical, challenging views and important information about this life, in ways that you won't find in the daily news. This is but one of the many ways in which underground music can speak with significance to all of us; maybe you'll start to recognise aspects of your own environs in these spooked-out, desperate, sound-worlds.

For potential buyers, perhaps I should point out that contributors include Allan Bryant of MEV, Government Alpha from Japan, and of course the reigning 'noise stars' of Michigan, Hive Mind and Wolf Eyes. There is also a bonus DVD of live material, extensive notes, and they're silver CDs (not CDRS); all this for $20 delivered! In America, that is. But I'm sure European shoppers will be welcomed with open claws.

ED PINSENT 10/11/2006

http://whfr.fm
www.topqualityrockandroll.com

The Caution Curves

The Caution Curves

USA INTIATED EYE RECORDINGS IE001 CD (2005)

Great set of very distinctive left-field avant rock music from three young women based in Washington DC. I saw one of them (founder member Rebecca Mills) in that town in May 2006, in the basement of a University building, wielding her laptop to great effect as the final act in a trilogy that included Tim Olive performing with a dancer, and a piece from a local avant composer. Here, they mix that laptop with familiar rock set-up of guitar, bass, drums and voices, plus added layers of subliminal noise. But you never heard any rock band like this in your life. Tristana Fiscella from Eeyore Power Tool adds the voice elements, and they are breathy, mannered and nonsensical vocal stylings that are totally brilliant. She seems to be in a holy trance as she performs, eyes tight shut, unable to snap out of it. On this half-hour CD, two long tracks available; 'Lemons' is a short and picayune doodle that dribbles and swings along pleasantly for few mins to arrive at its trivial conclusion, which is simply 'I Like Lemons'. But 'Leslie' is a much longer workout, with great semi-free drumming, computerised loops, insane moaning from Tristana. 'Leslie, come home', she enjoins, in her sad gestures of futile hope. And there is scads of inspired instrumental playing from the gals that feels like they're finding space – lots of it - either side of the expected notes. A single-minded trip into mild dementia that is totally engaging. Ya gotta love these intelligent and knowingly-weirdified young ladies. An informed update on The Shaggs? No, not really. Patty Waters meets Kleenex? Erm...

ED PINSENT 22/07/2006

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Various Slow Reptiles

Invisible Pyramid: Elegy Box

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 080-086 6 x CD (2005)

In 2003 Last Visible Dog put out the first *Invisible Pyramid* compilation (LVD 045-046), a double disc collection which (although it passed me by) is still making its presence felt with its lengthy tracks by Bardo Pond, Fursaxa, Reynols, Charalambides, MCMS, and many others. Not since the 1995 Drunken Fish triple LP *Harmony Of The Spheres* had such dedication to exploration of time and space been so keenly manifested. A mere two years later, LVD return to put another mark in the sand with this gargantuan six-CD collection that raises the stakes still higher. There are clearly a lot more musicians, both bands and solo projects, working in what we might call the 'long-form' mode these days, and not even the extensive Rebis compilations (see *Lead Into Gold*, page facing) can accommodate them all. Not only are there more of these bands, but they're also making much lengthier recordings, and more of them too, and they're all clamouring for release. All that's needed is an audience prepared to dedicate several hours of their lives to listening to it.

This particular box is decorated with a mystical and mysterious image of a turtle carrying an implied pyramid on its back, an image which references several unknown cosmologies and mythologies, and the collection comes with an 'elegiac' theme provided by its curators, one which is adhered to as a conceptual conceit in all the packaging and sleeve notes. The elegy is a heartfelt lament for loss of the animal kingdom, and provides encyclopaedic details on many extinct or threatened species of birds, beasts and insects with which we share the earth. Each track is dedicated to a particular living creature, with an additional paragraph describing how and why its existence is so marginal. By extension, I would guess that label boss Chris Moon tends to view the artists in his care as rare breeds of unusual species, and refuges like independent record labels as the only habitat in which a sensitive creative soul can survive the vicissitudes of this harsh world. If I'm making Moon sound like the owner of a safari park, that isn't quite the idea…

As to the music, it's almost all very droney, slow-moving and long-form. Few of the pieces have lyrics, and often take a long time to get started, and remain very subtle and limpid and static for course of duration. There are notable exceptions to this observation, but that's the abiding impression I have of the set. Some of it is absolutely beautiful and most of it will engage your mind, ears, heart and soul. No noise; Mr Moon eschews harsh power electronics in favour of the chorus pedal and massed acoustic guitars. The curator has clearly spent considerable time on the sequencing, but it's almost impossible to play this in one sitting, and no single disc of the six stands out as a completely satisfying listening experience. Better by far to play individual tracks as and when needed; treat it as a reference work, an imaginary book of Natural History bound in leather and decorated with sumptuous colour plates. Many music reviewers are doing just that, prefacing the latest CDR from an artiste with 'had a track on *Invisible Pyramid*'.

The compilation casts its net wide – it is an international survey of the 'underground' drone and rock scene, taking in the USA, Italy, Finland, the UK, Japan, and Australasia. Yet its range of operation is arguably also quite narrow; not a single musician here who's been operating for more than ten years, many drawn from related pockets of local activity (eg Tampere or Rhode Island) and almost all of them drone-merchants of one sort or another. For my money, the Finns scoop all the prizes, although the American contingent comes a very close second. I'm looking for eccentricity and variety, which the Finns do very well. We have music from es, Tomu tonttu, Kulkija, Uton and Avarus; those by es (ie Sami Sänpäkkilä, the boss of Fonal Records), include the exceptionally beautiful 'Pianokaari', which has also been issued by K-RAA-K on his recent wonderful double LP. Tomu tonttu do five short tracks dedicated to a bulldog rat, and sound mildly demented – certainly extremely puzzling. Uton conversely doesn't sound demented, although his work is withdrawn and intense, and he has his music dedicated to a Giant Skink. Avarus go completely nuts in Tampere and cement their reputation as the Finnish Amon Duul; all they can tell us is that one band member had a broken foot. Kulkija are nowhere near as agitated as any of these loopy Finns (including the sleepwalking Uton), yet their brand of ineffectual moaning really sticks in the mind. With seriously low-key, barely-existing thunks and strums and moaning breathy vocals, Kulkija create impressionistic sketches that barely cohere, and remain in the mind with the persistence of evaporating steam.

The Americans are well represented here by full droning / trancey bands, and eccentric loners; in the former camp, we have Bardo Pond, the SF heroes who stand out on disc one with a freaky episode of noisy guitar psych music, and Fursaxa, the mystery combo who have been productive for many years but are only a recent discovery for me. They have two of their great ceremonial voice-chant and events, full-on recorder blowing throughout. And let's not forget Black Forest / Black Sea, whose work transcends the overall stasis of the set, constantly changing and displaying some instrumental prowess.

The US loners include the great Mudboy whose typically idiosyncratic organ piece has nods to Terry Riley, but is filled with his own quirks. A very physical performance somehow and full of eeriness. Fellow Providence dwellers include the amazing Geoff Mullen, who is tipped by many as the next 'big noise' in solo guitar drones, and Area C (ie Erik Carlson) with a lush droner filled out by a guest drummer. Loren Chasse is a fantastic fellow out on the coast working with mysterious field recordings who simply can't do anything wrong. He has a standout track which stimulates the imagination with its watery sound effects and general air of perplexedness.

The Anitpodean contingent includes Peter Wright, Birchville Cat Motel, and Seht. Nothing wrong with anything these able fellows do, although I found Birchville's contribution forgettable and Seht's extremely irritating. From Japan we have Up-Tight and Miminokoto, both fourth-division garage bands who want very much to be Les Rallizes Denudes. Italy gives us My Cat Is An Alien, whose 'Elegy for all the extinct alien species' really gets into the collection's theme in a big way, but is also one of the longest and most beautiful cuts here. Funnily enough (having heard a lot of their records) it's the first time their unique combination of acoustic guitar and loopy electronics really made itself noticed to me.

And of course there's Ben Reynolds and Ashtray Navigations from the UK, with exceptionally gorgeous contributions…and Wolfmangler, who have the best name I've heard in along while, yet their music is nothing more than a klunky bedroom version of Sunn O))). Also Keijo, Steven R Smith, Flies Inside the Sun, Doctor Kettu, Urdog, One Inch of Shadow…In the final analysis, only the packaging and artwork disappoint me slightly; nothing wrong with the quality of the illustrations by Jeffrey Alexander and Stefan Neville, but there aren't enough of them for me. This paucity of imagistic content doesn't quite match the rich expansiveness of the music.

ED PINSENT 16/11/2006

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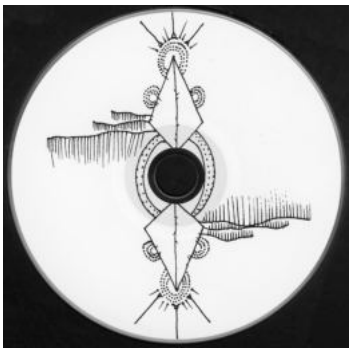

Various Alchemical Adepts

Lead Into Gold: Long-form works

USA REBIS 008 2 x CD (2006)

Follow-up to the previous Rebis collection in same vein ups the ante by doubling the disc-count, and allows ten long-form droners from the international (but mainly USA) underground stage much space and time to let their ideas hang out across two hour-long discs. I listened to this one 'blind' perhaps in a vain effort to detach myself from the prejudice which might have arisen from simply seeing the names of certain performers, so I'll record my immediate impressions as they stand and match them up to names later. Truth is I just forgot to bring the artworks on holiday when I packed the CDs in my Sony carry case, and as there's no information printed on the discs I just had to hope for the best. And the best is what I got. It's a pretty damn superlative collection!

Disc One's opener features a cosmic spacecraft spinning out of control, the hull burning up as it re-enters Earth's atmosphere. At last the captain regains control, but even so the motors don't sound like they're on full speed and danger still hangs in the air. A rickety flight in the stratosphere ensues, with many passing alien ships. Rough-edged, throbbing electronic musical delights...at point 11:30 it goes totally 'proggy' and brings in a sweet acoustic guitar melody plus a droning keyboard and wailing outer-space wah-wah guitar weaving a daring melody. Very Camel, I must say! Get yourself a copy of *Moonmadness* and play this alongside it. (Actually you should avoid that record if you can). Later addition: this is The Zoo Wheel and Liz Payne plays everything; she is also a member of Town And Country.

2: Desolate, icy-cold scraping on a violin or other stringed instrument redolent of doom and death. Endure this for five minutes and depression will quickly set in. Just before you slash wrists in sympathy, eventually the harsh tones are softened by added electronic instrumentation. In all this is a lonely metallic screech, totally cosmic, quite long in duration, full of high grandeur and passing on a sensation of falling helplessly in deep space. Again, very prog. Later addition: this is Of...Ohv, ie Loren Chasse with Christine Boepple, and it's called 'The Rocks will Open'. It was 'recorded in an enormous athanor'. Loren Chasse used to be in id battery and he's now in Coelacanth and often associated with the Jewelled Antler collective in the Bay Area of California, where enormous athanors abound.

3: Sporadic episodes of something happening on an electric guitar, maybe involving an ape. Also backwards voices, uttering deep and meaningless observations. Very muffled recording and it also uses lots of effects to further that muffling. An ingenious labyrinth of free-playing is the end result. Maybe everything is played backwards. It's probably better that way. A bitty tape construct of madness. Bring your own strait-jacket. Later revealed it's The Gray Field Recordings, R Loftiss with her friends. She has often transcended the gothic vibes she gives off on her own releases, and does so very well here. Of course she is not an ape.

4. A guitar and drum duo do a very good Faust / Neu Krautrock rhythm. Later, they are joined by a violin. Male voices supply a murmuring chant, women voices issue cosmic howls. What is this, an avant Greek chorus? Good trancey voice and rhythm work, in short. Given current state of the music arena, could be anything from Finland or the USA. Real 'singing in code', the way Fursaxa and Uton do, using private symbols and introverted language. A good collective sesh, one of the best on this collection. Amon Düül reissue sales are tripling as we speak... This is Son of Earth, featuring Matt Krefting, Aaron Rosenblum and John Shaw, who also run Apostasy Recordings.

5: Further private language escapades, this time enriched with alchemic practices and surreal dream-world visions, as mystery-monks from another planet chant odd meditational hums and blow endless coils of synthetic sound from their plastic horns. This is bizarre and brilliant work, producing shapeless layers of music in unpredictable and slow-moving configurations. In fact that 5-syllable word is far too clever for what's going on in this very simple, naturalistic, kaleidoscopic process. Flocks of flying birds, and flying aircraft (field recordings of them at any rate), are also part of this equation of sheer dreamy delight. Perhaps one of the most brilliantly 'suspended' constructions I've heard in this field for a long while. Only 14 minutes long, yet it speaks of...infinity! This is the Leeds-based duo Birds of Delay, who are Luke Younger and Steven Warwick. I gather many listeners are abuzz with Birds of Delay. Based on this masterpiece, I must join that throng and investigate.

Disc Two, track 1: An excellent semi-acoustic romp. The massed bouzoukis of the galaxy provide the soundtrack for a cosmic dance, with added finger bells and additional monotonous pluckings from some hippo. Another piece that in its simplistic way reminds me of progressive rock. And some nice extended violin passages. Someone has a Doctors of Madness LP lurking in their collection. This whole collection seems to owe a huge debt to Popol Vuh as well as to well-known krautrock music. This one is a lovely single-chord patterned patchwork that skips lightly along like the Fool in the Tarot Deck. This is White/Light who are two guys, Matt Clark and Jeremy Lemos, doing everything with guitars, oscillators and a shruti box.

2. Great! A dark and heavy atmospheric piece produced by methods unknown and from sources undiscovered. Either way you'll be lost in this thick fug of processed noise, eerie echoes, and strange twitterings – the whole mess punctuated by some very eccentric percussion. A holiday on Jupiter under a gathering space-storm, and that's the least of your worries. Intense 'gravity' in these slow-moving, abstract metallic clouds. A very good exploration of mankind's currently very ambiguous psyche. Unlike opening dance of joy, no dancing here, as the lead boots you must wear won't allow it. Fine substantial gloom work (the darkest piece in the collection) whose oppressive atmosphere is only slightly ruined by the coda which is an inconsequential guitar figure put through echo. Keenan Lawler did everything here with a resonator guitar in Louisville. It's called 'Time Subjugator' and it's an apt title for something that slows down your metabolic rate as surely as if your entire body were dipped in ether.

3. Hate this one; dull and boring, sounds like someone fixing a rusty bicycle wheel in a cold wind. Eventually more grandiose chords come in, along with a voice sample of a corny song intimating that 'Angels are watching over me'. Then tuneless violins and cellos groan portentously, adding to this avant-schmaltz, followed by tramping sludgy rhythms. A disjointed and self-important plodder! Unsurprisingly, this is Bruce Russell, whose pretentiousness usually drives me to distraction. I realise this The Dead C founder is held in high esteem, but not by me.

4. Pleasant enough, but not much real event in this subtly-layered collection of drones, murmurs, shuffling and whispers. Too vague and uncertain to be a real grabber, even if it picks up a few bits and bolts and electronic squibs near the end. This is Bird Show with Lichens. Bird Show are Ben Vida and Adam John Vida. Lichens (Robert AA Lowe) has a solo LP on Holy Mountain which is excellent!

5. Great solid 'droning on the mountainside' type music on a grand scale. I hear organs, guitars, and synths. Lots of instruments seeming 100 times as strong as normal, massed inside a huge cathedral as they slowly process in loops, simple patterns, and rotating Ferris wheels of sound. Beefed up by studio processes, no doubt, but these larger-than-life patterns of noise will pull you convincingly into an unknown world. The Opera Glove Sinks in the Sea is one person, Gwyneth Merner, armed with a theremin and a computer.

In all this is a very strong collection of (a) cosmicity and hymns to deep space, (b) other worlds, viewed by the strength of sheer imagination and (c) new life forms evolving new languages. At worst, sluggish and samey drone-gunk (of which there's a tonne and a half available on the music market already); at best, a sparkling and awe-inspiring set of far-out musical treats. Note also the aboriginal folk art markings on the CD labels. And of course the covers use lots of imagery filched from Alchemy books, although the 'lead into gold' theme is not really explored visually, conceptually, or sonically.

ED PINSENT 22/08/2006

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BLACK BEINGS

DEMENTIA - DOOM - DAMNATION

JENNIFER HOR blasts out a bilious brew of barbaric BLACK METAL bruisers loosed from the lugubrious lair of Lucifer's Lurk!

Amaka Hahina

Aheah Saergathan!

FRANCE DRAKKAR PRODUCTIONS DKCD026 CD (2002)

Abandon hope, all ye who dare enter this terrain of black metal ambient musick for here lurketh some of the creepiest, most sickly and depressing tunes on offer from this solo project of one humbly named Lord Beleth'Rim, formerly of the Black Legions band Torgeist and currently of Vermeth. Each track on this short but unsweet album is structured around simple and repetitive organ chord melodies that sound quite plaintive and lend a certain cheesy charm to the otherwise nightmarish soundscapes in which divers nocturnal critters howl, whine, groan and wheeze, and the Lord himself graciously puts in appearances here and there with growling statements in a strange mixture of French and an obscure language that features on many Black Legions recordings. The atmosphere of the record as it proceeds becomes quite delirious with echo upon echo of the cacophony of voices that bay for attention, and even the organ melodies assume a demented character; overall the whole thing seems like a soundtrack to some long-forgotten black-and-white B-grade Gothic horror flick in which cheap effects abound and monsters very obviously resemble humans in tarted-up scuba diving suits.

At once this is a very disturbing and despairing recording, full of hate and disgust for humankind, and yet on another level it's blackly hilarious and twisted, and with the passage of a few more years it's likely to be regarded as a camp classic of sorts. Only the sickest of minds therefore will be able to appreciate this piece of insanity and since you readers have all faithfully followed me in fair weather and foul and encountered all manner of demented black metal music in these pages (nyeh-heh-heh), come ye forward now and taste more of such sweet sickness ...

JENNIFER HOR

www.drakkarproductions.com

Astrofaes

Those whose Past is Immortal

UK SUPERNAL MUSIC FERLY021CD (2005)

Here cometh excellent BM of the no-nonsense

raw and primitive kind with buzzing guitar and fast drumming yet embellished with elements of Ukrainian folk music. Astrofaes hail from the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv which, if reports of the effects of the winter of early 2006 on the city folk are anything to go by (of nearly 500 people in Ukraine who died from extreme cold during January, the majority lived in Kharkiv and many of these were homeless), must surely be among the Grimmmest of Grimm environments: just the right setting for one of the world's strongest BM scenes. The trio's music achieves a good balance between melody and other song-based elements and structures on the one hand and, on the other, those of the more lo-fi, noisy and riff-based BM style. Each track is evidence of a sound knowledge of song-writing and musical composition and all are forceful, distinctive and more or less self-contained within the album, not needing to rely on tricked-up atmospherics or special effects (though these are used sparingly). In all, this is a stirring recording - well, I guess that possibly no small part of Ukrainian Aryan National Socialism which hold that Ukraine, being the original homeland of the Indo-European people, is home to the purest of pure Aryans, had some influence - that is sure to take your breath away and knock your socks off six times over.

Best tracks are the beautiful and surprisingly uplifting 'The Depths of the Past' on which acoustic stringed instruments, piano and steely guitars join together on wonderful melodies and runs that mobile phone companies, if they shared a brain, would be falling over themselves to buy; and 'Soul of the Black Forest' which has some really quite spaced-out keyboards work over driving guitar riffs. Lyrics to all tracks are printed in both English and Ukrainian in the CD booklet.

Astrofaes shares two members Thurios and Amorth with Drudkh and Thurios has played with Hate Forest whenever that band

performed live.

JENNIFER HOR

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Astrofaes (Roman Blagih): www.astrofaes.com, astrofaes@ukr.net

Circle of Ouroborus

Shores

USA NORTHERN SKY PRODUCTIONS NO NUMBER CD (2006)

Dani Li of Goatowarex who sold me this album warned that it sounds very different from most BM and indeed it does: the band has a very good sound, very deep and muscular with the usual buzzing BM guitars that much of the time are also very darkly sparkling and occasionally even jangly. The real stand-out though is the vocalist who initially resembles Mark E Smith of the Fall the first time I spun the CD (yes he did!) but with repeated listenings now bears a close and highly nasal resemblance to one Homer Simpson of the famous cartoon series: the singer's half-speaking / half-singing monotone style is usually out of tune with the music which otherwise would be excellent but I quickly got used to it and the whole recording for me seems like a long-lost underground garage punk rock classic

from about 1978-1980 apart from a few tracks like the all-instrumental piece 'Timbre Noir part 2' where the downpour of torrential distorted vibrato guitar rain reminds me that this is meant to be a black metal album. Indeed the band includes a very energetic if somewhat heavy-handed and riff-laden version of Joy Division's 'She's Lost Control' where the vocalist actually acquits himself surprisingly well in his unvarying style though I guess to be fair the original song itself is mostly monotone and partly spoken.

Really I ought not to be so hung up on the singing as this is actually a very good garage rock BM album with strong if not instantly catchy melodies, robust rhythms and a distinctive style. It's buzzy enough for BM yet the production is clean and allows for the sparkling guitar tones to shine through. The last track 'Invocation' sounds more conventionally BM with a genuinely malevolent and muddied atmosphere and some growling vocals for once! The more I listen to *Shores*, the more convinced I am that the vocalist is not only channelling the world's best-known dysfunctional slacker couch-potato dad, he is channelling another far more significant person ... could it be Joey Ramone? ... sounds very like Joey Ramone in parts ... I'm going to stick my neck out and say this recording is sure to become a classic of sorts in years to come.

It amazes me that despite being an apparently conformist society where it seems rules are actually made to be obeyed to the letter and beyond, Finland continues to produce such off-beat and demented acts like Circle Of Ouroborus in different musical genres.

JENNIFER HOR

www.northernskyproductions.net

Contra Ignem Fatuum

Detritus

UK SUPERNAL MUSIC FERLY036MCD (2005)

Of late the British label Supernal Music has been releasing some really interesting and off-beat black metal records (as might be expected of a label run by the guy from Benighted Leams) and this sinister and cold martial BM recording by the UK band Contra Ignem Fatuum especially is a worthy disc that deserves a lot more attention than it may have garnered so far. The EP is dominated by the title track which has an icy and numbing feel in the keyboards (which, on their own, could sound quite soothing) and the constantly buzzing guitar chainsaws: the whole Ultima Thule soundscape could be described as a sort of symphonic black metal / noise ambient trance piece for want of a better term. Yes, listen to this EP long enough and you will enter a deep, deep winter underground trance state where ice never melts and chilling blizzards roar forever. The vokillz, treated with reverb, are super-deep and gravelly, and I imagine when I myself reach my use-by date and finally descend to Hades that the Great Grim One Himself, sitting in judgement on my misdeeds, will pronounce my ultimate and eternal punishment in such harsh and severe tones.

The two minor tracks which bookend *Detritus* are more atmospheric and verge on industrial / classical: 'Hyperborean Ascention' (sic) in particular is at once stern and militaristic yet oddly soothing and quite beautiful. On the whole, the EP's concept as suggested by the track titles and the relative importance given to each track seems somewhat unusual, dealing as it does with the aftermath of war and slaughter and the total destruction of the old order and culture based on Judeo-Christian-Islamic values, followed by the (inevitable as CIF see it) rule of the Hyperboreans / Ubermenschen who create their own morality and values and build a new civilisation around these.

JENNIFER HOR

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Draugar

From Which Hatred Grows

USA tUMULt RECORDS TR232 CD (2004)

He may not be so well known (yet!) as his fellow San Francisco one-man BM bands Leviathan and Xasthur but surely in all the Blakk Metal Universe there are few who can create music so desolate, deranged and melodramatic, and so just plain 'out there' as Hildolf's Draugar project. From start to finish on this recording the nooks and crannies of your skull and the crevasses of your brain are subjected to a thorough and pitiless scourging thanks to Draugar's weird and entrancing mixture of spaced-out and off-kilter keyboards (very prominent in the mix), machine gun percussion, blizzard noise guitar riffing spiced with electric and sometimes acoustic guitar melodies, and Hildolf's own horrific death-rattle vokills. Few tracks are very distinctive - 'Dust Chains Idiots' and 'Lonely Corners of Existence' being two exceptions - so it's best to hear the album in its entirety though this means having to sacrifice your sanity; many, nay most, will be those whom this recording will reduce to incontinent babbling and drooling fools. (Uh, yeah, well I and a few others like maybe Andee Connors who runs Tumult Records or perhaps Savage Pencil at *The Wire* are kinda immune but you gotta understand we take regular doses of this style of demented BM as others might take arsenic or snake venom regularly to build up resistance.)

Though much of the recording can be monotonous noise and the pace is unremitting, I recommend it very highly if you are interested in noisy and chaotic BM. The keyboard work in particular is disorienting and suggests a choir of a thousand angels gone insane from having fallen from the peaks of the firmament down, down, down to the lowest abysses of hell; you too will join them in eternal torment by the cranium-cleansing guitar noise and the brittle vokill rasps. Slightly muddy production adds depth and crazed despair to proceedings and track titles tell of existential anguish and a desire to escape the pain of life and ever-oppressive humanity. This is one ideal soundtrack to lose your mind to.

JENNIFER HOR

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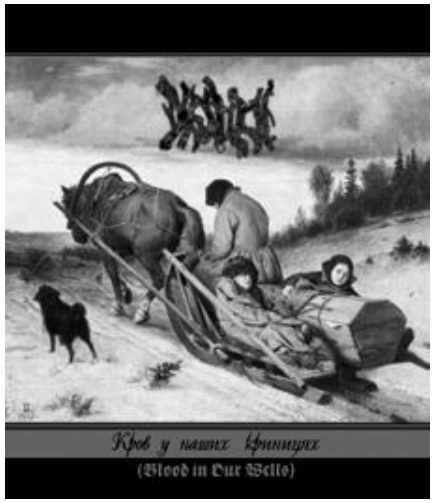

Drudkh

Krov u nashykh krynytsyakh (Blood in our Wells)

UK SUPERNAL MUSIC FERLY037 (2006)

This album is a natural progression from the previous *The Swan Road*, being more melodic with a better integration of the Ukrainian folk music and BM styles and the BM itself moving closer to mainstream heavy metal / hard rock (guitar solos now feature on a number of songs). In some ways this is a better recording in that the entwining of BM and folk gives a more lush and layered music with an epic feel and an atmosphere that is at once hopeful and despairing. Songs now have catchy melodies and the guitar riffs are often very powerful and dramatic. In a different age we would say this is Drudkh's breakthrough album which would introduce the band to a wider audience beyond BM and earn Roman Saenko and friends regular invitations to Ozzfest. On the other hand, much of the music featured can be fairly humdrum and uninspiring with the kind of lumpen plodding percussion rhythms I thought BM had left behind way way back in the 1980s and a couple of tracks, 'Solitude' and 'Eternity', have long instrumental passages that are repetitive and don't add much to the songs or the recording as a whole. Disappointingly the album seems to get worse as it progresses with the BM element barely there in the last three tracks. For this reason I cannot recommend this album to the diehard BM tragics among us; as a bridge

between hard rock and BM, it's not bad at all though the nationalist Ukrainian sentiments probably rule it out as a beginner's guide of sorts to BM. (With lyrics in Ukrainian, non-Ukrainian-speakers might not care anyway.)

JENNIFER HOR

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Spektr
Et Fugit Intera Fugit Irreparabile Tempus / No Longer Human Senses
FRANCE APPEASE AM003 CD (2004)
Spektr
Near Death Experience
UK CANDLELIGHT RECORDS CANDLE130CD (2006)

Excellent pair of albums from the Paris-based BM duo Spektr whose members currently are Haemoth and Krig. This band has a vicious and terrifying buzzsaw guitar attack akin to what a steel raptor with jaws full of hundreds of chattering metal needles for teeth must scream as it swoops down at Mach 1 speed with unerring accuracy on its helpless victims in some sci-fi horror story, and this sound, often manipulated for melodic and rhythmic effect, is usually constant all the way through on both recordings. The albums have to be heard as concept albums in their entirety at a fairly loud volume to get the full ambient Spektr experience as it's usual for the duo to insert filler / trailer pieces of an often ambient, neoclassical or found sound nature between tracks.

Et Fugit Intera Fugit Irreparabile Tempus / No Longer Human Senses is a more obviously BM recording with actual guitar melodies against the sonic roar, and wraith-like vokillz of pure evil alternate with sometimes distorted spoken word samples. The title track is the best piece with moments of melodic sadness and melting voice. As the album progresses, the tracks turn out to be chapters in an ongoing narrative that can be quite horrific and even blackly funny at the end of the album.

Near Death Experience is a technically superior recording, again incorporating industrial, electronic and ambient influences and sampling, found sounds and spoken word tapes as on the previous CD; it may be a bit less BM and more a soundtrack to a psychological cyberpunk-horror

movie but for sheer intensity and sonic terror it's damn near unbeatable. The highlight of this CD would have to be 'Phantom Reality' where the ongoing guitar blizzard seesaws up and down at one point in the track and takes on a new hard-edged steeliness. The ferocity is somewhat less than on *Et Fugit ...* with many quiet-ish passages of drone and white noise, and the album surprisingly ends more with a whimper than a bang but this is in keeping with the mystical / sci-fi concept of astral travel of a person's soul, its contact with a (presumably) higher mystical reality and the psychologically devastating consequences that follow.

As far as I know, Spektr is a purely studio-based project for the two musicians involved. Krig plays drums for the more purely BM band Battlehorns and Haemoth has a BM project which is also called Haemoth.

JENNIFER HOR

Appease Me: http://appeaseme.free.fr/
Candlelight Records:
www.candlelightrecords.co.uk

Vinterriket
Winterschatten
USA FLOOD THE EARTH RECORDS FTE002 CD (2004)

Initially this German BM / ambient recording promises much (though the vocals are buried rather deeply in the mix) but all too soon those blizzard guitars disappear and we're stuck with a lot of filler 1980s-style synth-ambient music that describes various aspects of winter as it affects nature, done in a not very original way. You can guess at what I'm hinting here: tunes in thrall to disco beats and synth-pop rhythms with pure tones that hurry everything along and don't allow the listener to reflect on what's happening

while also keeping any atmosphere at bay (track three); and smooth synthesiser string orchestras which are overbearing at times when a delicate touch is really called for (much of the album). When the electronic rhythms are dropped, the music acquires the necessary moody wintriness and improves in that respect but I still find the tones too smooth and pure and the sound effects very derivative.

The best tracks are the title track and 'Schneesturm / Einbruch der weissen Dunkelheit' which feature the fierce fuzzing guitar storms that contrast texturally with the pure melodic keyboard tones and crisp drumming. At the album's end is a cover of Burzum's 'Der Tod Wuotans' from the 'Hlidskjalf' album, an all-synth affair which I regard as fairly weak conceptually and musically compared with other recordings in the Burzum canon; Vinterriket preserves the piece's melancholy air and its solemnity (and inadvertently shows up his own music as lacking in strong melodies and atmosphere) if not all the sadness, due in part to a changed musical context. Apart from these three tracks, the album does not convey much wonder or emotion about the snowy country that inspired it, and much of it sounds very preconceived and stereotyped with seemingly little attention paid to pace, sonic texture and volume dynamics.

JENNIFER HOR

Flood the Earth Records:
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Vinterriket: www.vinterriket.com

Fall of the Grey-Winged One
Aeons of Dreams
UK SUPERNAL MUSIC FERLY043CD (2006)

Now most of you will think that the obvious comparisons with this Belgian one-man doom / ambient project will be acts like Boris, Corrupted, SunnO))) and Whitehorse at their most instrumental drawn-out and apocalyptic, especially in the short pieces on this recording where the music goes: 'BOOOOM! BOOOOM! BOOOOM!' and causes everything to judder and shake so violently that fire alarms everywhere go off, trees and buildings topple over, panicky people run out into the streets and you have helluva lot of explaining to do when the emergency services fellers turn up. And indeed all the way through this recording the ambience is very heavy and oppressive as if

the Final Judgement had just been delivered upon the few humans left after the all-out Global Nuclear War that leaves our planet completely fried and glowing in the dark, and the sentence proves to an endless searing sandstorm that slowly but steadily abrades away all flesh and spirit.

But the one person I think of each time I spin this CD is laptop guitar-man Christian Fennesz - now that he's teamed up with Japanese pop music stalwart Ryuichi Sakamoto, Fennesz is probably the last chap you lot will think of! - mainly because when the bells of doom cease tolling and the title track begins its 40-minute journey through waves of low-end grit, loose gravel and rumble. there actually isn't that much that's different between the two axe-men if you take Fennesz's work in the late 1990s (*Hotel Paral.lel* for example) as a point of comparison: Stijn van Cauter gives a lot of attention to the textures of the drone and their variation so while the drone rides roughshod over hot rocks and bitumen as it were, it rides a fine balance between seeming too busy and maintaining the listener's attention, plus the guitarist's treatment of the drone and some other sounds and effects (some of which are melodic) can be very delicate. The whole approach is precise, minimalist and possesses feeling; at times there are fleeting moments of loneliness. When van Cauter and Fennesz get together (in our dreams of course), we will be amazed at how their respective styles will harmonise and complement each other so well that perhaps the only major contrast is context: one guy's coming from the deep end and the other's coming from the high end.

On our hands and knees, folks, and give thanks to Alex Kurtagic for his far-sighted wisdom in reissuing this album on his Supernal Music label which more usually releases black metal records of an often eccentric bent, at least until he caught this rara avis. The CD sleeve artwork of computer-generated mazes and lattices is something to behold too and very appropriate for the music: the idea being, I think, an odyssey through vast dimensions in time and space in another universe.

JENNIFER HOR

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Stijn van Cauter: http://svc.null-void.com

Funeral Mist

Salvation

FRANCE NORMA EVANGELIUM DIABOLI NED002 CD (2003)

For most of this recording bar the last several minutes these Swedish guys know only two speeds: hellishly fast and even more hellishly fast, making for an extremely chaotic and blurry but intense experience in which guitars, drumsticks and snare drums get shredded faster than a bird can fly into a fan. A wonder the musicians don't age as fast as well. The production is very clear and there's quite a lot of reverb so the guitars and the percussion sound quite tinny with even the snares seeming a bit like garbage bin lids so the record isn't as blurry as it would be with a more muted atmosphere. Vokills by Arioch are very meaty and sinister and they overlap so that on some tracks aspects of himself seem to be having a dialogue, and well they might for the lyrics in each song can be contradictory as though they constitute a battlefield of thoughts in which the only certain outcome is death and chaos.

Within and between tracks are various samples of field recordings such as chanting monks and bells which enhance the disorienting effect of an otherwise relentless and often quite repetitive and monotonous album and which create a musical tapestry of sorts in which the main threads are of an anti-religious and apocalyptic nature. Stand-out track on this album would have to be 'Circle of Eyes' for Arioch's strangely undulating and inhuman voices which give the impression of slithering subterranean snakes; the music itself is quite simple structurally but this allows for samples of chanting monks aplenty and so the whole song epitomises the dualism of the album's concept. *Salvation* comes as a double-edged sword indeed.

In all, this is a really intense head-cleaning experience that'll spin-dry your brain and make your ears gush with toxic fluids from within your skull from the sheer speed and force. There's no let-up until near the very end where the last piece 'In Manus Tuas' (featuring a most interesting guitar intro) fades into an out-of-tune chamber music piece with a wandering clarinet that seems more appropriate for a circus freak show. If the rest of the album didn't quite send you around the bend, maybe this part should tip you over nicely. And if that doesn't work, some of the artwork in the CD booklet which includes photos of stills from what are probably Ingmar Bergman movies and stillborn conjoined twins just might. The guys from Funeral Mist and French BM label Norma Evangelium Diaboli would have been most interested in my copy of Armand Marie Leroy's 'Mutants' which has some alarming pictures and illustrations of one-eyed babies and conjoined twins but I think the book was published later than the album was released.

JENNIFER HOR

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Akitsa

Aube de la misanthropie

THE NETHERLANDS SADOLUST RECORDS LUSTCD:07 2 x CD (2005)

After giving this anthology of work spanning four years (1999-2003) a number of spins, I rate this set very highly indeed: Akitsa is nominally a BM act based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, but the music here is as likely to sprawl over what sounds like power electronics and experimental guitar improv faintly reminiscent of New Zealand guitar noise improv band The Dead C as it does dark ambient and garage rock BM. Nearly tracks on the first disc are from a 1999 demo 'Totale Servitude' and represent Akitsa at the duo's most experimental: many pieces feature either tuneless melodies on acoustic guitar or equally non-catchy and crude riffing on electric guitar with hectic percussion, and distorted vokillz that become screeching or echoing howls. The production is very basic and the whole recording resembles something by one of the more demented and determinedly lycanthropic Black Legions groups of France: the blisteringly raw music, powered by anger, hatred and aggression, careens everywhere and the vokillist gives way to all the daemons and nightmares raging and jostling in his head and vents his emotions in crazed ululations. Someone get a straitjacket for this guy - you dread to think what he'll do to himself! Even a piece like 'Folie amere' which is mostly dark ambient with rumbling guitar drone still features the most insane noises a human voice can make.

A long piece, 'Redemption', clocking at over 20 minutes, takes up under half of Disc 1 and consists of a long high-pitched drone that strings together (and by doing this possibly seeks to obliterate) a series of field recordings of prayers addressed to the Christian God and the Virgin Mary: the flat voices reciting the prayers and litany and the drained atmosphere of the entire track leave you in no doubt as to what Akitsa thinks of this 'redemption'.

The tracks on the second disc come from several recordings including the *Aube de la misanthropie* demo made in 2001, for those of you possibly confused by this review (because some of you may already have the demo). Tracks 1 to 3 are still experimental with basic rhythms, improvised guitar passages and thick fuzzed-up guitar noise clouds polluting the loudspeakers and the air you breathe while an evil goblin voice delights in your suffering. Powerful atmospheric music with echoing screams and roars of monstrous three-headed hellbeasts features here. As we continue, the music becomes a bit more recognisably BM with definite punk-influenced guitar melodies and some actual singing for a change but the deranged madman tendencies are never far away. Track 6, 'Cachots de l'obscurite' ('Dungeons of darkness') is as the English translation of the title suggests a cover of the Burzum track of the same name (it's significant that of all the work Burzum has done, Akitsa

would cover this particular track which showcases Burzum at its most dark ambient / atmospheric / experimental) and features a creepy cavernous atmosphere, industrial fumbling noises that suggest a struggle to escape from a cage, and long drawn-out screams.

Tracks 8 to 11, from the demo *Aube de la misanthropie*, are probably the most BM pieces (relatively speaking) on this set: the music is more structured and features more melody but is still primitive in its rhythms, continues to strive more for atmosphere and effect, and is ever ready to fall off the deep end yet again or to fly off at unpredictable tangents. The demented raving and shouting continue on 'Champ de bataille' which also has quite a catchy(!) rhythm; this is followed by 'Nature Supreme' on which - surprise, surprise! - the pace is slow and the vokillist actually hums and croons! The final piece 'Outro' is a fine exercise in melancholic, desolate and hateful distorted guitar noise and drone (and seems very close to The Dead C at their most ear-achingly abrasive): a fitting way to finish off this highly eclectic set.

Of all the BM records I've heard so far this year (2006), this double set is Pure Black Nekkkro Gold: it's simply wonderful, delirious and insane. I know for a lot of you it's going to be hard to find and you may have to look on eBay but this is essential listening for all BM fans who consider themselves tr00, kvlt and nekro. People who love the French Black Legions bands and can't get enough of raw and misanthropic French-language BM also need to get this set.

JENNIFER HOR

Sadolust Records: www.sadolust.com
Akitsa: www.akitsa.cjb.net

Various Artists
Les Légions Noire: Anthology Vol 1
LE MOND MORT RECORDS CD-R
Various Artists
Les Légions Noire: Anthology Vol 2
LE MOND MORT RECORDS CD-R

Hungry for more of that Black Legions / Les Légions Noires stuff I reviewed in TSP#14? Of course you all are! Well, hunger no more - someone has scooped up a stack of rare tracks and demos by the more obscure 'bands' of the LLN network - 'bands' that by the way are actually no more than projects or side-projects formed by various members of Belketre, Vlad Tepes and Torgeist, the main stalwarts of the LLN scene - and bundled them onto these anthologies. On the whole these CD-Rs are quite good although the recording quality can vary from so-so to the pits and the music which wanders from out-and-out punky BM to really self-indulgent ambient improvisation of the 'what the fuck were they drinking / snorting / sniffing while they were doing this?' sort (although I think the LLN bands were actually very anti-drugs in their outlook), distinguishes itself by its enthusiasm if not always good sense or restraint.

The first anthology consists of 13 tracks by 13 'bands' (see above) with exotic tongue-twisting names like Dzlvarv, Vagezaryavtre and Vzaeurvbtre; with the exception of two very long pieces (tracks 6 and 13) clocking in at about 20 minutes each, the tracks are usually short and savage in their approach and feature very raspy vokillz, some of which were obviously inspired by too many Warner Bros cartoons featuring the Warner Bros' famous whirling-dervish Tasmanian Devil, he of the unintelligible mangled grunts and ruuu-owrghs. Best tracks on this disc include Black Murder's 'Deadsex' (good middle riffy section and very aggressive); an untitled piece by Dzlvarv (hard to hear but very moody with lots of hellish screaming); Seviss's 'Peste' (garagey and raw with a catchy rock-'n'-roll rhythm); and Vermyapre Kommando's 'Juden?' (knife-sharp guitar edge, tinny cymbals, chaotic drumming and mangled roaring vokillz stand out). The long pieces are memorable for being unstructured and experimental in approach: the track by Vzaeurvbtre, incidentally the funniest on the disc, features deranged violin-fiddling, crazed screaming and lots of moaning, and someone either snoring or breathing very heavily; and the untitled Project Black Legions track seems a lot like a vampiric Old McDonald's Farm with much bleating, snuffling, snarling and sharpening of fangs going on, all very weird and amusing.

The second volume contains four collections of demos by Dzlvarv, Moevot, Susvourtre and Vagezaryavtre, totalling 18 tracks. The sound quality is more variable on this disc than the other: the Vagezaryavtre tracks are quite clear, the Dzlvarv ones not so. Incidentally, each of the 'bands' featured here have a track on the 1st volume that's also on this 2nd volume. The Dzlvarv tracks have thumping rhythms, a thin guitar sound and lots of weak raspy screaming. The Moevot tracks are the most musically varied part of this disc and the most ambient and unstructured: each track is like a Gothic mini-drama / mood piece with some tracks having very bare melodies that create a creepy and haunted ambience and a couple of pieces sung entirely a cappella by choirs. Susvourtre's section suffers from coming right after Moevot: the sound quality is indifferent and the music itself - just bass guitar, percussion and werewolf vokillz - isn't all that great. Bringing up the rear with 4 tracks is Vagezaryavtre whose style is similar (vibrato bass, thumping percussion and a couple of guys trying to out-gargle each other) to that of Susvourtre but seems more minimalist. The only BM elements these two acts have and share are the monster voices and maybe the track titles and lyrics which are in a mix of French and an esoteric language of the musicians' own devising. The music mainly serves as a platform for the vokillists to make idiots of themselves with their yelping and howling - a good thing (or maybe a bad thing?) the paramedics weren't passing by at the time of recording.

If you can only afford one of these recordings, Vol 1 is the better and more varied of the two; some of you may also already have one or more of the demos featured on Vol 2. I'd recommend this 2nd volume only if you are really keen on the Black Legions bands and must absolutely own everything they have done. If you are keen on getting these anthologies and can actually find a likely source (I got my copies from Metropolis Bookshop in Melbourne but they are extremely hard to come by and you'll probably have to trade or look them up on eBay), I advise you to get them at a reasonable price, as in no more than US$50 - 70 or its equivalent let's say, if you can.

JENNIFER HOR

Black Lodge
SolarKult
END ALL LIFE RECORDS EAL045CD (2006)

Pretty much full-on BM industrial aktion from start to finish rules here. The BM influences seem limited to some of the singing, occasional vibrato guitar passages and the lyrics in which Satanism, drug-fuelled mysticism promising elitist transcendence and an apocalyptic end to human existence are shot through with cyberpunk sci-fi / techno-fetishist fantasies. The 'metal' is more

mainstream heavy metal than BM and the industrial influences are in the beats and the various effects and samples that provide detail. I haven't kept up with the industrial - heavy metal fusion scene for several years now so at risk of showing how decrepit I am, I'd say this record will appeal more to fans of groups like System of a Down and Front Line Assembly. Come to think of it, that Swedish BM industrial group of the mid-1990s, MZ412, had more atmosphere and a real sense of menace and corruption which are lacking in *SolarKult* and could have made it a really effective BM industrial record but it's possible Black Lodge opted to do without these in making a record in which the path of Satan includes some contemporary creative experimentation with chemistry (and ingesting the result) and even more contemporary creative (if more irreversible!) experimentation with physics, biology and technology plus various combinations of these.

As I said earlier, this is really full-on and intense with not much subtlety - though there are a few moments of calm, I wish there were a few more of them! - and as the record progresses, there's no small amount of wild-eyed (or if you like wild-voiced) insanity on vokillist Saint Vincent's part and quite a bit of melodrama in the music which can be unintentionally amusing though it's never camp I hasten to add. If you, like Black Lodge, imagine yourself as part of an elite techno-mystical terrorist cell called the New Templars, you probably do run the risk of being OTT.

JENNIFER HOR

Black Lodge: www.loginsatan.org
End All Life / Norma Evangelium Diaboli: www.noevdia.com

Emit

A Sword of Death for the Prince

SWEDEN TOTAL HOLOCAUST RECORDS THR77 CD (2005)

Yes, it's meant to be a BM record and the sentiments expressed in the printed lyrics are as misanthropic, apocalyptic and defiantly against organised religion as BM can be, but the actual music itself seems more akin to industrial guitar noise feedback abuse of a Wagnerian bombastic kind. It starts with a huge crash, bang and wallop and for a while everything seems completely chaotic but the music calms down fairly quickly and for most of the CD alternates between fits of screaming, declamation and violent instrument torture on the one hand, and passages of ambient if gritty guitar drone on the other. In a review I saw on *Encyclopedia Metallum* (www.metal-archives.com), the reviewer confessed he got a headache after listening to the recording after 30 minutes - just over halfway through - and had to take some tablets and listen to some goth metal therapy. What a wussy! Had he persevered, he would have found the rest of the album somewhat less deliberately turbulent and chaotic but no less theatrical, and actually a bit more structured and therefore more menacing and malevolent. A melody of sorts can be heard in 'Echoes of Mass Murder, the Dark Bleeding' but generally the tracks, being riff-less and having no rhythm, can barely be distinguished from one another; 'Where God's Shadow Resides' tends to be relatively quiet and settled and the last track 'Into the Black Waters' is an ambient drone piece.

Imagine that Psychic TV hired some musicians from Burmese and Genesis Breyer P-Orridge got a brain transplant and ended up with the brain of William Bennett from Whitehouse (well, not impossible given what P-Orridge has so far had done to ... himself? herself? - can't tell now), and then the whole band made a record with Masami Akita on remixing and production duties: the result might be close to what Emit has achieved here. (At the time of recording *A Sword ...*, Emit consisted of one member, a very publicity-shy guy called Unknown I.) Definitely recommended only for those made of very stern stuff!

JENNIFER HOR

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Total Holocaust: www.thr666.horde.se

Marzuraan

Solid State

UK TRAQUETO RECORDS TQ007 CD (2005)

Quite a few excellent doom metals concentrating on all-instrumental music have emerged in the UK over the last several years and Marzuraan is one of these. The band's sound is very gritty and rumbling and while the musicians might not come down with the force of 10,000 tonnes of concrete plummeting from the top of a 100-storey building, what they lack in sheer power and brutality is more than compensated for by a sinister sinuous approach and lots of menacing motorcycle rumble which sometimes becomes ramble. I don't mind those episodes where they appear to go nowhere though: all five tracks were originally recorded live so I presume everything is mostly improvised. All the music is pretty good apart from those periods where the rumble stalls then drives forward again. The best track is saved for last: 'Reoccurring Nightmare' (sic) starts off slowly, dragging its feet, but along the way some strange force takes over and our musicians start speeding up, and next thing you know - it's lift-off! - there they go flying off on some doomy, almost psychedelic trance journey of their own making, leaving behind a lone guitar drone to remind us that once they graced England's shores. (Until of course they came back for the next release which I think was a demo.)

Nifty artwork courtesy of SunnO))) / Khanate man SOMA combining lots of abstract geometrical lines with a silhouette of a deadly snake, the teeth of a shark, repeated images of what looks like a suicide and two images of a Darth Vader figure about to carry off a female victim is to be found on the CD package which folds out into a cross.

JENNIFER HOR

www.traqueto.co.uk

Glorior Belli

O Laudate Dominus

ITALY EERIE ART RECORDS EAL004 CD (2005)

Finally managed to come across a French BM recording I can actually call 'ordinary' after encountering so many extraordinary BM recordings and artists from the Land of La Marseillaise. Admittedly Glorior Belli are aggressive in their approach and good at what they do which is straightforward technical BM in a style similar to that of Swedish band Funeral Mist if less frenetic and unadorned by sampling but I find the trio's 2005 release a letdown. I know I've been spoilt by all those Black Legions bands, Spektr, S.V.E.S.T. and others besides and if I hadn't heard these bands' recordings before hearing GB, I probably would have rated this effort a lot higher. As it is, only the gruff vokillz on the album stand out in any way and even then, having already heard a Krieg album, I find Krieg's Imperial outdoes GB's vokillist Infestuus in the technical throat-sandpapering sound-a-like category and in sheer wildness. Yes, however fast and angry these GB musicians become, they still seem mostly sane and disciplined which explains why I'm not all that impressed. I understand there's an audience out there that wants and appreciates technical BM without any hint of chaos or possibility of falling apart so I'll leave off GB and stick with the loonies; at least I know where I stand with them (which is not very well if you need to know, I keep falling over and laughing).

JENNIFER HOR

Eerie Art Records: www.eerieartrecords.com
Glorior Belli: http://gloriorbelli.free.fr

Negura Bunget

'N Crugu Bradului

ITALY CODE 666 CODE014 SPV 085-148422 CD (2002)

This is a very beautiful and sumptuous work of black metal art by the Romanian band Negura

Bunget whose name translates as 'Dark Forest' or 'Fog' and 'Forest' depending on what source you look up. A deep reverence for nature, in particular for the mysterious forests and snowy landscapes of the Transylvanian Alps and beyond in western Romania, is the inspiration for this recording which is divided into four long pieces at about 12 - 15 minutes each in length. Mid-paced BM, blastbeats, bursts of guitar and gravelly vocals combine with acoustic folk melodies, atmospheric keyboards and a clean production in a tapestry with more unexpected twists and turns than a magic carpet in a fairy-tale, and with a full-bodied epic feel that leaves the impression that the music more or less is creating itself and the musicians are but conduits to channel the mystic sounds and voices of a strange and dark country into a format we ordinary mortals can understand. The music can be very complex and features a lot of very off-kilter melodies and atonal features spread throughout the BM passages as well as the folk-oriented music, and I find it necessary to listen to this album several times to appreciate the many hidden qualities and depths within, There are so many contrasts at work here, often all at once (as on, say, the eighth minute of Part three where clear trilling acoustic Latin guitar is accompanied by a cold cloudy keyboard passage) and the music can bounce from one folk extreme to a BM one and back; the concept of the album being what it is, the chaotic nature of the music is not at all irritating and you even come to expect it.

If I had to pick the best part of the album, I'd say right away that Part four, featuring really eerie atmospheres, solid BM guitar crunchiness and completely other-worldly high-pitched keyboard melodies which introduce a slightly demented psychedelic aspect to the track, is the best although much of it is mysterious rumbling ambience with a low drone, some metallic shimmer and strange howling creatures. All lyrics are sung in Romanian which adds an exotic touch to the proceedings, though the printed lyrics are not translated into English. I actually don't see this as a problem as the music is so dark, harsh, passionate and haunting, it really surpasses what words can describe.

The band Negura Bunget hails from Timisoara in far western Romania and is sometimes described as a Transylvanian band though Timisoara is not actually located in the region of Transylvania but in the region of Banat. The city's main claim to fame in Western popular culture is that it was the birthplace of the 1930s American sports star / actor Johnny Weissmuller, he of the famous Tarzan series of movies (his co-star the chimpanzee Cheeta was still alive as of this time of writing)

JENNIFER HOR

www.code666.net

Orthodox

Gran Poder

SPAIN ALONE RECORDS ALR014CD (2005)

A creature of extraordinary beauty and majesty yet also implacably grim and solemn, steeped in the ancient and mediaeval history and customs of Andalusia in southern Spain where this young band hails from: this is the amazingly self-assured and well-crafted debut album *Gran Poder* (Spanish for 'Great Power') from the doom metal trio Orthodox. The opening track 'Geryon's Throne', alluding to the myth of the ancient Greek hero Herakles's Twelve Labours of which one was to travel far beyond the Straits of Gibraltar to an island to capture the cattle of the monstrous three-bodied King Geryon, is a jaw-dropping 27-minute creation in which guitar riff piles upon guitar riff and cymbals crash unceasingly in a surprisingly minimalist style. Any guitar melodies that appear seem at odds with the rhythms, with the effect of disorienting the listener just before the low end rumble and eerie twangy guitar vibrato start up followed by a long passage of improvisation in which guitar drones heave and whine like out-of-control jets and percussion titters in anticipation of a momentous auto da fe; in response the guitars vibrate like flickering flames and the rhythm shudders, then everything bursts into an inferno together. There is singing but the vocals sound oddly distorted, distant and tremulous. The production is actually quite clean for this kind of music which helps to create an odd atmosphere of stillness and oppression of the sort one imagines existed in Spain and its territories during the Inquisition and after.

The second track 'Arrodillate ante la madera y la piedra' is dominated by relentless improvised drumming punctuated by long drawn-out guitar drones and tuneless chords; perhaps not quite as dramatic and atmospheric as the previous track but then that one is so stunning in its trance-like effect that the rest of the album can't help but be a footnote. The closing piece 'El lamento del cabron' (I'll pass over the brief third track which is a repetitive duo of snare drum and piano) turns out to be very fast and perhaps inadvertently it reveals stoner rock / psychedelic influences though the entire album in its own fashion could be said to be psychedelic. No wonder Julian Cope waxed enthusiastically (if he doth protest too much in the CD's favour) and nominated it his Album for the Month (March 2006) on his website www.headheritage.com.

What impresses me most about the recording is the band's dedication (the hombres even wear - yikes! - black grimm robes of their very own!) and attention to details such as atmosphere which emerges from the austere minimalism of the music (nearly all guitars and drums): it's a sort of invisible but heavy presence, the source of never-ending guilt and existential pain and suffering felt by all under its manipulative influence. What could be more Dooomy and Grimm than this? A very highly recommended release.

JENNIFER HOR

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Rehtaf Ruo

Boiled In Goat Blood

USA DEMONOLATRY RECORDS DR001 CD (2001)

Just when you think the BM scene is over-saturated with bands whose members haven't a single original idea among themselves and the scene itself seems ready to lurch down the familiar commercial path of lowest common denominator conformist rock and pop as industrial music did about 20 years ago, here like manna from heaven (heaven?) to appease our hunger for out-there music arrives this wonderfully filthy and necro self-released recording from the US act Rehtaf Ruo. (How more necro can a BM band's name be than backwards-pronounced monickers like Rehtaf Ruo and Havohej?) Totally fruitcake in every fibre of its being from start to finish is this inspired album whether we are referring to the slurpy serpentine vokillz more whispered and spoken than screamed, the percussion which varies from crappy machine-gun beats to bombastic lurching drums, the inhuman guitar buzz that goes on and on and on as if programmed on an infernal Hell machine by a DJ-ing demon or the production itself which makes the whole record sound as though recorded in various parts of a secret monastery including its catacombs, the entire building complex having been deserted ages ago by monks fleeing an invisible and evil contagion:

parts of the record are very clear and crisp while other parts sound as though they were done on shitty equipment, and everything seems to have taken place in a hidden subterranean world.

All nine tracks are good though the record gets better as it goes along. So many strange things are happening here I swear that for once these Rehtaf Ruo guys really did sell their souls to their namesake. 'Pure Unholy Death' features a creepy church organ intro, evil cherub voices, dribbling demon vokillz, those insane drum machine beats, the guitar fuzz texture and many other noisy elements all mixed in a steel vat. In 'Child Sacrifice' we get a very weird flowing guitar looping sequence which sounds at once crisp and lo-fi (well it just has to be heard to be believed). Track titles all look like they're straight out of an *Exorcist* clone movie or novel: 'Ritualistic Evil', 'Cold Black Blood Occultism' and 'Satanic Torture' to name a few. The album concludes with an ambient soundscape 'The Depths of Hell' which describes a normal day in the underworld: lots of dark space with an atmosphere heavy with dread, strange snuffling noises and the cries of the eternally damned among other background noises. Completely bonkers with snatches of piano melody here and there, lots of banging and scraping rhythms, screams and spooky stuff going on, this track picks up the trail of experimental improv BM where Swedish BM Abruptum left off. Can it be that somewhere in this piece Rehtaf Ruo meet IT?

On our knees then and give thanks and praise to the Almighty that whacked-out BM records such as this continue to fall into our outstretched palms and hooves. (What?! Haven't looked in the mirror lately? After listening to this and various other BM releases in these pages, surely you've got little horns budding in your foreheads!) Oh, we are not worthy to receive such gifts as these ... where's the whip? ... more flayings are needed ...

JENNIFER HOR

www.rehtafruo.com

Svartsyn

Bloodline

PORTUGAL SOUND RIOT RECORDS SRP034 CD (2005)

Reissue of the original 2001 vinyl recording together with two bonus tracks from a 1998 EP *Tormentor*, this is a strong set combining equal amounts of riff-based rhythms and guitar melodies, and equal measures of technical prowess and aggression. Svartsyn's style is competent if not exactly very inspired and original, and leans towards a more mainstream heavy metal direction with most tracks featuring at least one guitar soloing episode. Occasionally keyboards flit around the edges. Production is very clean, almost polished, and I guess anything less would detract from the band's technical style. Apart from the bonus tracks which have a raw and fevered feel and which are probably the best part of the album, the whole thing seems very business-like in the tight and sure way it ploughs through the songs.

I confess that I usually avoid Swedish BM unless it's really outstanding and comes with many recommendations, in the same way I avoid much Swedish pop and rock which I find on the whole lacks bit and distinctiveness and often seems to 'play by the numbers' if you get my gist. It may be too much to ask that Svartsyn try to reclaim some of their early fire and ferocity as evidenced on the extra tracks but one hopes they do not eventually fall into the dross that's all too often characteristic of their country's music.

JENNIFER HOR

Sound Riot Records:
www.soundriotrecords.com
Svartsyn: www.myspace.com/svartsynband

Weakling

Dead As Dreams

USA tUMULt TM17 CD (2000)

First and last full-length recording for the San Francisco BM band (indeed, it was first released after the band split), *Dead As Dreams* is highly regarded by many people and few other BM records I've heard can match it in intensity and aggression yet I have to admit I don't enjoy it much and can't find much of what I'd call 'soul' in it. Weakling do all the right things a BM band should do - the album has a slightly muddy production and murky atmosphere and the vocalist is heart-rendingly screechy in the best Burzum tradition - but I have the impression that this is the kind of all-very-technical instrumental riff-based epic alternative prog-metal album that once upon a time Metallica could have pulled off before they recorded their self-titled fifth album in 1990 which for better and for worse propelled that particular San Francisco band on a very different trajectory. Yes, I suspect that had Weakling continued they would (of course) have developed a much more distinctive sound and style while retaining their aggression and deep intensity, and perhaps (this is my assumption) would play around more with the BM elements instead of treating them with strict reverence.

The album clocks in at close to 80 minutes so with the music so full-on and unrelenting in pace (though it isn't especially fast overall) it can be an exhausting journey: track 2 alone is about 20 minutes! There's hardly space to take a breath before the band plunges straight into another long instrumental passage and even the quieter, slower moments on the album can be draining.

JENNIFER HOR

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Krieg

The Black House

USA RED STREAM RECORDS RSR-0169 CD (2004)

A very solid effort from this USBM project which for this recording expanded from original lone member Imperial to a 4-piece band and so I would say this recording is most likely very different from Krieg's previous releases which I haven't yet heard though I believe some of them have no bass guitar. By the time you read this review Krieg will be no more so if you are looking for an entree to the recordings of this project, this album might be it: pretty much every song here begins like a runaway truck crashing into your living-room and the entire delivery is full-on fast, brutal and aggressive yet surprisingly there are definite guitar melodies and actual drum rhythms especially in songs like 'Sickening Voices Without Speech' and 'Ruin Under a Burning Sky'. The production is rough-hewn and Imperial screams as if he's being tortured or electrocuted throughout (indeed this album must have been torture for him as it's based around his mental illness and the nightmares and suffering it causes him, hence the title *The Black House*) but I say the very rawness and the vocal extremes Imperial goes to elevate this album to the level of a masterpiece.

At first I found the inclusion of Velvet Underground's 'Venus in Furs' a bit strange and the Krieg cover makes me guffaw still but there is a dark and sinister reptilian ambience about it and the lyrics agree with the album's concept. Krieg need not have defended the song's inclusion at all in the CD sleevenotes; Imperial could have told his detractors to just fuck off and die in tr00 black metal fashion.

My favourite track is the instrumental piece 'A process of Dying' which ends in a screeching

deranged guitar maelstrom. This is definitely music not as soothing therapy but as the nightmare to send you insane.

JENNIFER HOR

www.redstream.org

Lugubrum

Heilige Dwazen

BELGIUM OLD GREY HAIR RECORDS OHG 001 CD (2005)

Might take some time and a few spins for some people to get used to this Belgian band's shambolic and woozy combination of BM and lager-swilling farmyard jazz. Or should that be jazz and lager-swilling farmyard BM? Whatever, once you realise that this music's meant to be all over the house and the lyrics in particular pertain to bodily functions associated with a certain standard household plumbing fixture, you too may find a whimsical if very oddball charm in Lugubrum's way with a genre of music not usually noted for being warm or whimsical or jazzy or even related to farm folk unless it be to burn down their wooden or weatherboard churches and convert them all to paganism. In amongst the blurred guitars, scuzzy riffs, sometimes frantic rhythms, basic production and the howling vokills treated with reverb, the saxophone introduces a melodic element around and against which (and against one another too) the other instruments and the vokills swirl. As might be expected, the tracks are not at all coherent in themselves and so the album is best heard as a whole with the tracks treated as chapters or variations in an ongoing sprawl (the track titles themselves are treated at one point as lyrics in a song) that eventually reaches a goal: in a strange netherworld an evil little doll chuckles away while playing a cheap hurdy gurdy. Not quite the blasted nihilistic release from life that most BM has in mind.

This being Lugubrum's sixth full-length album, the guys obviously have been 'refining' their particular brand of sloppy BM-jazz for quite some time though the odd and maybe sacrilegious thought has occurred to me that if Lugubrum were American or Japanese, the music might flop around a lot more than it does here but at the risk of losing its eccentric charm and sounding more contrived. The territory Lugubrum lurch around in is not without its perils and maybe it's due to the tension involved in navigating their way that Lugubrum have been able to create interesting and quite endearing music which admittedly is not that brilliant, and have been accepted by the BM community along the way.

JENNIFER HOR

www.oldgreyhair.com

Lustmord

The Place Where The Black Stars Hang

USA SOLEILMOON RECORDINGS SOL141CD (2006 REMASTERED EDITION)

I hadn't encountered Lustmord as a solo artist before but I have heard some of his old band SPK's work (I still have an old SPK album, *Zamia Lehmanni: Songs of Byzantine Flowers* which was recorded long after he left the group) so when I came across this reissue, I expected the music to be bleak and, on a certain level, nihilistic; to an extent, I was not far wrong - as befits a soundtrack detailing the very edge of the universe beyond which chaos exists, the ambience is very eerie and oppressive and the feeling that we are all on our own on this tiny blue planet and the universe is oblivious to our headlong rush into self-annihilation, be it through global nuclear war or through the impact our activities create on world climates and the Earth's resources, not to mention on our long-term genetic viability, is very real - but though the music is very long and doesn't vary a

great deal, and could be taken as a fairly typical example of industrial-sounding dark space ambient, it does possess a hypnotic and solemn majesty. I could play this album several times over and I don't think I would hear the same thing twice; even the silences within the recording are gravid with a strange if heavy mood as if the artist has condensed all that can be known and sensed about the boundaries of our existence into this music and every pore is squeezing it out bit by bit when it gets played. What I didn't expect with this album, though in retrospect I should have anticipated it, is a quasi-spiritual / religious aspect to the whole thing: the event horizon where black holes contact the universe represents the ultimate leap into the void where reliance on 'truth' and 'facts' does you as much good as blind faith and superstition, these being but dark twins to scientific rationality. The longest track, 'Metastatic Resonance', even seems to wear a sort of radiant sonic halo which distinguishes it readily from the other pieces.

This album is possessed of a deep and alien beauty, initially dark and sinister, but gradually revealing a secret which we can accept and find some comfort and assurance in, even if on terms unfavourable to us. Despite the music and its concept having been formed in 1993, it has not dated much at all (the sound is a bit 'warm' which is the only indicator of this recording's age); indeed, we probably need this CD's 'message' more now than we did then.

JENNIFER HOR

www.soleilmoon.com

Make A Change ... Kill Yourself

Make A Change ... Kill Yourself

SWEDEN TOTAL HOLOCAUST RECORDS THR83 CD (2005)

A dirgey and very solemn funereal doom black metal offering from this delightfully named project of three Danish musicians one of whom at least has a regular day job in a band called Angantyr, this album starts off well on a very solid and beefy sonic footing with tremolo guitars pounding out repetitive riff after repetitive riff at a steady pace but as the recording progresses and passes through passages of keyboard-based tones and melodies, and ambient sections, it seems to lose its edge and aggression somewhat and the male vokillz in particular seem much less menacing than they could be. (Quite possibly this is because the person who wrote the rather childish lyrics is not the person singing them.) The sound overall is quite good but the slow pace dulls the impact and power of the music and the singing gets lost in the long drawn-out riffs.

I am undecided about having female vocals on this kind of BM: Demonica has a lovely and sweet voice but I find it's at odds with music that's meant to be misanthropic and seething with animosity towards life. Some of the keyboard passages do not seem very original and I keep thinking I've heard them someplace before on a long-forgotten Swedish goth industrial CD from way back when. Bands and one-man projects that specialise in themes of despair, self-hate and suicide are not exactly rare in BM and it seems to me that American bands especially have cornered this part of the BM spectrum (which does not say a great deal that's positive about life in the United States today) so I should think Make A Change ... Kill Yourself have their work cut out on developing

a more sophisticated and less narrowly focussed and simple-minded lyrical approach, and on injecting a lot more venom and hate into the music to compensate for the pace. If you need suicidal BM in your life because you're sick of all those self-help books that promise to increase your emotional IQ or teach you 10-step programs to win more friends, make more money or improve your love life, you deserve better: start with Burzum's *Filosofem* ...

JENNIFER HOR

www.thr666.horde.se

Thee Plague of Gentlemen

Primula Pestis

SWEDEN I HATE RECORDS IHRCD011 CD (2005)

Enjoyable doom metal from this quartet of gents from Ghent in Belgium with a good deep motorcycle rumble as part of their sound and concentrating mainly on a riff-based approach to the music. Guitarist / vocalist Steve McMillan sounds like a mellow version of Metallica man James Hetfield, tough, gravelly and self-assured and gets the lyrics out of the way efficiently enough so the instrumentals which TPOG know are what we are really hanging out for on this album can get down - way, waaay down! - to the business. The band can plod as slowly as any other doom band but when the boys are overcome by the spirit of rock'n'roll as on 'The Hidden Elixir', the jolly gents can really go for broke tossing out riff after riff like there's no tomorrow and indeed this is my favourite track on the album with 'Your Love Is King (Of The Dead)' not far behind, sounding as if UK doom band Cathedral had hired Hetfield as vocalist and was inspired by the choice. Perhaps TPOG are not the most original doom band and some of those adventurous English doomsters like Moss and Marzuraan leave them far in the dust when it comes to advancing the domain of the genre into uncharted waters but if you've forgotten how enjoyable and fresh doom can be even when full of the usual musical clichés associated with that music, then you need TPOG to remind you.

I confess at this time of writing I haven't yet seen the videotracks which are on the CD and which can be viewed on a PC or Apple Macintosh.

JENNIFER HOR

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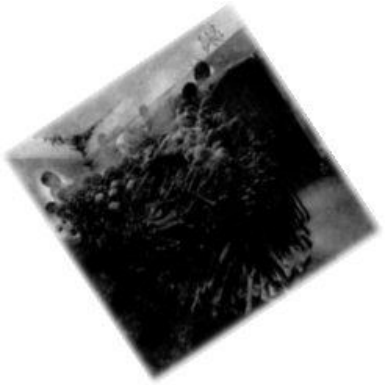

Wolok

Servum Pecus

ITALY EERIE ART RECORDS EAR010 CD (2006)

Disregard the silly printed lyrics and just enjoy the combination of primitive-sounding BM with sandpaper vokillz that seems as though recorded in very makeshift conditions on the one hand and the crystal-clear keyboard and other effects on the other. Various details such as swirly choirs, goblin and monster voices all in a blather, very dark sparkling tonal passages and guitar chords that seesaw up and down ensure this punky BM record is head and shoulders above its competitors (of whom there are an awful lot in Wolok's native France) and give it the substance lacking in the lyrics: to take one example, 'Phallus Absconditus', there are good corkscrew guitar chords that make you feel nauseated but the words, referring to how organised religion and its propaganda fuck you over in lurid imagery, cause your eyes to glaze over at the sheer purpleness of it all. Wolok would probably be better off not writing any actual songs but should try creating all-instrumental BM soundscapes where they can experiment more with daemon voices, unusual guitar chord sequences that threaten to suffocate you and production techniques that 'age' the music and make it seem very primeval yet fresh as has been done on this album.

The cover art by Polish fantasy artist Zdzislaw Beksinski who was tragically murdered in 2005, is quite terrifying even in a small CD sleeve setting reproduced only in black and white; I shudder to think what it might look like as a full-size colour painting in an art gallery (and I believe Beksinski did create some very large works), the picture is very surreal in content and the detail of the skeletons within is repetitive to the point of being obsessive.

JENNIFER HOR

Eerie Art Records: www.eerieartrecords.com
info@eerieartrecords.com
Wolok: http://wolok.free.fr

Monarch

Monarch

FRANCE NINJA TUNING #2M-41957-2004 2 x CD [2005]

The only full-length release (and a double set at that!) by this short-lived French doom metal group Monarch, this is a looong skull-crushing affair in which riffs the size and shape and force of a 10,000-tonne slab of concrete suddenly let loose from the top level of a skyscraper fall on your head again and again with a sound slightly reminiscent of the UK industrial metal band Godflesh at its peak (some time in the early 1990s) while a female vocalist lost deep in the rubble left behind by the music shrieks at the top of her lungs. Track one, 'Dead Men Tell No Tales', is appropriately definite in its stately manner and constant repetition which assumes a triumphant air; not so celebratory is 'Somewhere Below the Devil is Laughing', a much more sinister being whose beginnings are very formless and vague industrial guitar dronings that eventually mould into a dread dirge of finality, relentless in its monumental and slooow repetition while the lady continues to scream in the background. The pace is so glacial and juggernaut-like that changes in the music tend to register subconsciously in the numbed brain cells and as the track wears on, it appears to disintegrate very slowly with only the pained vocal and the black atmosphere holding everything together but only just.

The second disc has only one track, 'Les Lumieres have been blown out', which takes forever to get started (but what interplay between actual sounds and black silence) and via minimalist repetition of an agonising sort which alters imperceptibly but surely, eventually reaches its climax, turns into something quite serene and then descends into textural furriness with the screaming adding yet more pain and texture to the decline.

Yes, it is all very slow and repetitive and equivalent to banging your head against a wall until all feeling goes and numbness rules, and concentration is required most when the grey matter has gone all comatose, but the music is rewarding in its own way. A certain majesty is there and the musicians seem to be in control pretty much all the way through.

JENNIFER HOR

Monarch / Ninja Tuning #2, C/- Mike Bidegain, B.P. 13, Bidache, 64520, France

Rigor Sardonicous

Principia Sardonica

USA PARAGON RECORDS PRG-23014 CD (2004)

By all that is holy, what is this slag-encrusted behemoth that's hauled itself out of a thick, murky and foetid swamp in the poisoned nether regions far beneath our feet? Why, 'tis the US band Rigor Sardonicous who play a deathly (and death-themed) dooom metal so laden with thick gluggy mud, crawling mutant algae and the smell of decay that even doomsters like Corrupted

and the newly blackened SunnO))) start to look a bit like prepubescent choirboys next to this lot. I am not sure whether RS is a trio or a duo, seeing that the drums / percussion role which includes whacking an out-of-tune cymbal that might actually be a saucepan lid in disguise is credited to one '?!', I kid ye not. Most tracks have little in the way of strong or memorable riffs and rhythms to identify them - indeed, they are so drawn out they barely hang together and the very lethargic instruments are often reduced to the very minimal on some tracks - that I think few people can possibly bear to hear this recording all the way through, and most will quit on hearing 'Phases of Death' which is a sonic atrocity exhibition of the death process.The guitar tones are so sluggish, so deep and so abrasive in a ruthlessly minimalist kind of way that they would tear huge strips of skin off any delicate creatures nearby (so don't let the pet hamster / budgie / rabbit and most of your friends hear this CD) and that wacky cymbal that gets banged a lot is sure to curdle anyone's nerves. Manic of all has to be guitarist / vocalist Joseph J Fogarazzo's style of singing which goes beyond broken boulders crunching and grinding small furry critters in a dinosaur's gizzard. (Hey! Keep that hamster / budgie, etc etc away!)

Only those totally dedicated to the Tao of Deathly Dooom will possess the necessary fortitude to endure this stomach-churner to the end if that batty cymbal does not completely addle the brain. This is a pity in a way as RS take the doom metal genre to an extreme minimalism that even the aforementioned Corrupted and SunnO))) have not yet visited. If you think you can stand the RS way, you may try listening to it track by track before playing the whole thing from start to finish: tracks 5 and 8 are the best. Plus you gotta love bands that dedicate such twisted and manic depressive recordings to ... THEMSELVES.

JENNIFER HOR

Paragon Records: www.paragonrecords.net
Rigor Sardonicous: www.smilingdeath.com

S.V.E.S.T.

Coagula / L'Ether du Diable
FRANCE END ALL LIFE RECORDS
EAL041CD [2005]

S.V.E.S.T.

Urfaust
FRANCE END ALL LIFE RECORDS
EAL042CD [2005]

Amazing that the French continue to crank out extremely raw, grim and blasphemous black metal bands like there's no tomorrow and the wonderfully named Satanas Vobiscum Et Spiritum Tuo (or S.V.ES.T. if you prefer) are no exception. *Coagula...* is a compilation of demos and various songs that may have come from split records with other bands dating back to 1998 and is very much in the style of early classic Norwegian BM with extremely noisy and static-filled buzzsaw vibrato guitars, variable pacing and aggressive vokillz that sound as if they had been recorded in a very deep mine shaft lined in steel. On a few tracks, the lead guitarist shreds his strings at the speed of sound producing a piercing tone reminiscent of early Mayhem guitarist Euronymous's work. Production on some tracks is about so-so to somewhat good which some may see as a bit of a letdown: a really bad and static-filled production would have made the band sound even rawer and more aggressive! Overall the collection is a very extreme, hate-filled and angry musical survey with a lot of raw energy.

However if you can only afford to get just one of the two S.V.E.S.T. albums under review here, without doubt you have to get *Urfaust* the most recent studio album which has an unbelievably epic sound without sacrificing any of the raw and grim intensity of the early efforts. (If anything, the band manages to sound even more raw here than on the demos.) The jaw-dropping Mach 2-speed noize guitar shredding and the booming percussion put the guys into a class way beyond chaotic and the lead guitar in particular introduces a psychedelic element into the already nauseous proceedings. It seems to me too that the song-writing (if we can call it that) has improved for the first track 'Putrefiance Redemptrice' builds the aggression and tension up to the eighth minute and releases it all in an overwhelming mind-destroying / brain-frying / head-bursting / eyeball-blowing / ears-spouting-toxic-gunk guitar explosion that's got to be one of the most magnificent moments in the history of BM, and alarmingly S.V.E.S.T. insist on continuing this most satanic and sacrilegious rape of what little is left in our heads for the rest of the track (another mind-blowing 10 minutes if we each had another mind to blow).

The rest of the album is no less of a mind-fuck though compared to 'Putrefiance Redemptrice' it's kind of like a footnote: the psychedelic influence continues in the guitar work and keyboard and other special effects that appear. The band's overall sound is very full-bodied with pounding drums, spiky / sparkly guitar and vokillz that give the impression the singer's got more than a few crushed rocks in his throat. (And singing BM-style in the French language does have a certain, ah, 'charm' about it.) Of note here too is that the album's coda is exactly the same as its intro so you could play it over and over and over and the whole thing forms a loop.

Altogether this is one album that's hard to beat for sheer ferocity and grimness, and already I'm looking at it as a textbook example of how BM should be done (well, some of the time). The artwork on the album is quite tasteful and, strangely for a BM band, S.V.E.S.T.'s logo is actually quite elegant and legible.

JENNIFER HOR

www.noevdia.com

Sapthuran

To the Edge of Land
USA GOD IS MYTH RECORDS
GIM016 CD (2005)

Rising out of the bitterly cold northern Thule environment (to which it returns after forty plus minutes), this is a great nature-themed concept recording that blends atmosphere, field recordings and found sounds, soft acoustic guitar melodies and very primitive riff-driven BM. Singing is very harsh, dry and crackly and the Burzum-like pointillist guitars are no less raw. On occasions where both electric and acoustic guitars are playing together, they more or less match each other note for note on very distinctive melodies; the purely acoustic guitar passages, aside from providing tonal and textural contrast, add a contemplative mood and help structure the music by building up to and coming down from the harsh and basic BM. This may not be the most innovative BM recording of its kind but considering that primitive BM has existed since at least 1990 and there is so much of it about, I'm surprised that fresh if simple recordings such as this one are still being made and moreover promise that many more such wintry gems are hiding in the snowy depths of Sapthuran's home.

Perhaps unusually, Sapthuran's main man, currently based in Fort Thomas in the US state of Kentucky, rejoices in a name no more nekro than Patrick Hall. At this time of writing, Sapthuran had one other full-length album, *...In Hate*, also released in 2005 and 2 split CDs with USBM acts Leviathan and Hills of Sefiroth respectively and both released in 2006.

JENNIFER HOR

God is Myth Records: www.god-is-myth.com
Sapthuran: www.sapthuran.cjb.net

Tenebrae In Perpetuum

Antico Misticismo
FRANCE DEBEMUR MORTI PRODUCTIONS DMP0013 CD (2006)

Here is a really creepy and sinister recording from an Italian two-man BM project. The band hails from Imer di Primiero, Trentino-Alto Adige, in northern Italy and *Antico Misticismo* is the second full-length release.

It features liberal use of reverb that renders the vokillz all but absolutely unintelligible (I can't even tell what language is being used though all

track titles are in Italian), inhuman and distant, and which gives the tremolo guitars a steely, piercing kind of tone. The pace of the music ranges from fast to medium with the odd slow passage which I think TIP could have included more of as the guitars sound spidery and suspect when the rhythm goes slow. Atratus who handles everything except drumming (left to Vidharr), shreds his strings like there's no tomorrow most of the time so while melody and flair are absent, the overall effect is harsh, extremely cold and very severe. I think that, considering the particular sound TIP has, the odd short melodic guitar solo and some long clear tones would not have gone astray because as the album progresses the overall sound seems to get a bit thin and the music needs some variation to draw attention away from this shortcoming. Even so, this is such a grim recording and so icy to boot, I swear every time you listen to this all the way through, your blood will always need to defrost in the microwave oven for at least an hour afterwards.

JENNIFER HOR

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The One

Guardians Inhuman

SWEDEN TOTAL HOLOCAUST RECORDS THR 027 CD (2003)

A short album at just over 32 minutes but nevertheless it's a very distinctive one with a powerful sound and majestic style. Sole member Evil Dark is currently based in London but originally hails from Greece (Rhodes). The main achievement of this debut full-length recording is how it conveys darkness and implacable strength using a raw and steely style of music close to classic primitive BM without succumbing to the usual BM stereotypes and conventions. Evil Dark's vocal style in particular is deep, dignified and quite leisurely with just the right amount of reverb and he speaks rather than sings (let alone scream like the rest) the straightforward lyrics which avoid the OTT depictions of war and bloodlust one expects from BM and most other forms of heavy metal; the impression I get is of a cruel and impenetrable hegemon who commands vast armies against the frail and useless defences of a doomed humanity. I may be mistaken but I think I detect what may be some Greek folk musical influence in the guitar playing especially in the track 'I Am The One'. At any rate the music does sound a little exotic. The music is mostly mid-paced for BM with percussion that on some tracks verges on the

doomy, and the strummy guitar playing is riff-dominated with some melody.

So much about this recording seems just right: there's neither too much nor too little of particular elements like the pacing of the music or the treatment of the vocals. This is a really efficient album with absolutely no fat around the middle and edges, and the presentation is quite polished and tasteful yet it still sounds raw. At the time I was writing this review The One had a second full-length album in the works with possibly a 2006 or 2007 release date so it'll be interesting to see if Evil Dark can sustain the promise of this first album and still be the one and only ... The One. (Killer name, that!)

JENNIFER HOR

Total Holocaust Records: www.thr666.horde.se
The One: http://www.theonekult.cjb.net

Twilight

Twilight

USA SOUTHERN LORD SUNN47 CD (2005)

Considering that members of Leviathan, Xasthur, Draugar, Krieg and Nachtmystium participated in this project, I find this album not the mind-blowing monster mammoth it could have been but on the whole the music is good. Some people may kvetch that the fivesome should have striven for a definite band sound and feel but the fact that Twilight sounds like a different band on every song has a certain appeal as the musicians are all confident playing together no matter how they play or what they play. Given that four people take turns singing, three take turns playing guitar and three take turns playing bass, it really would be spooky if they all ended up sounding the same!

The actual music itself straddles the raw minimalist BM camp and the melodic, more mainstream heavy metal side of the business. A number of tracks don't have very much of an atmosphere which for some listeners may be a drawback as a definite 'atmosphere' of sorts would have helped unify the nine different songs on the CD. The better tracks seem to be ones where Malefic of Xasthur is playing either guitar or keyboards or where Hildolf of Draugar is on vokill duties; the worst track in my opinion is 'Exact Agony, Take Life' which has a horrible death metal rhythm (and I suspect even a lot of death metal bands would reject it) that upsets the flow of the rest of the album. Disappointingly Hildolf's contributions is limited to his deathly cries on some tracks in the middle part of the CD; another disappointment is that seeing as there are three musicians from San Francisco involved, the music doesn't even have a hint of psychedelia or something a bit off-kilter and slightly demented.

I guess if you are not already familiar with any of the acts here and so don't have certain expectations, you'll find Twilight the album very well executed with a very high standard of musicianship, thanks in part to Leviathan's Wrest who took care of all the drumming and more besides - indeed, I think that his Leviathan identity is in danger of getting a bit lost on this record as his contributions are spread over a number of instruments and other duties which might have involved trying to get everyone together in the same spot at the same time. (I understand this was not achieved, one of the guys apparently let the others down but I won't name names.) There are some very strong pieces and some tracks, especially the last one, can be quite emotionally affecting. This record could serve as a handy introduction to the individual acts, particularly Draugar whose style

of demented outsider BM needs a strong and well-fortified stomach to, er, stomach; even here on this album, Hildolf's distinctive style of singing takes some getting used to. If Twilight decide to continue and all five musicians can get together in the same place at the same time, it will be interesting to see if they can still have everyone taking turns playing different instruments and producing a more unified and flowing work.

JENNIFER HOR

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Vargleide

Lish Prah, Okalinu, Vyzhenu Zemlu Ostavlya / When only ashes and scorched earth

are left behind
SWEDEN TOTAL HOLOCAUST RECORDS THR 55 CD (2004)

If the militaristic phalanx of raw blistering guitars and equally distorted half-spoken vokillz sound very familiar, you're right: Vargleide used to be Forest whom we met in TSP #14. The drumming on this Vargleide recording is now natural but is as relentless as ever; as the album progresses the rhythms vary more and much of the percussion work especially on the cymbals is creative and very impressive. First impression can be that the guitars do not change much from track to track, everything being fast and the strings just roaring from start to finish, but listen closer and you will find that at the end of a number of pieces there is some guitar improvisation with the odd melody or two arising to the surface briefly and then fading away. Production is very clear and the editing is much better than on that Forest CD reviewed in TSP #14: here I only found one sharp break and that was at the end of a track.

This is a highly martial recording with hard-hitting rhythms, severely minimalist and disciplined guitars, declamatory singing urging troops to war and even melodies and the whole ambience of the album inclining towards aggression to say nothing of track titles like 'For the Flame to Forge' and 'Spare not thy Sharpest Blades' and the printed English lyrics which summon vivid and fiery sword-and -sorcery fantasy images of ancient Slav princes and warriors fighting for honour. Like Forest before them, Vargleide are members of the Blazebirth Hall Group of bands (most of whom seem to share the same musicians, mainly Kaldrad Branislav, Ulv Gegner Irminsson until he was murdered in late October 2005 and a few others) which adhere to National Socialist Black Metal beliefs that combine neo-fascist beliefs (which may actually have little to do with neo-Nazi ideology), Slav nationalism and possibly pre-Christian Slav religious ideas; I have no idea what Russian NSBM bands might believe in but the notion has occurred to me that their beliefs might be at odds with Ukrainian NSBM bands' beliefs if as I suspect the latter revolve around the notion that Ukrainians - but not Russians - are the direct descendants of the original Indo-Europeans / Aryans.

When this album was recorded (in 2000), Vargleide consisted of Kaldrad and Irminsson. The album was reissued in 2004 by Stellar Winter Records on cassette and by Total Holocaust Records on CD.

JENNIFER HOR

www.thr666.horde.se

Vordr

II
GREECE NYKTA NYKTA012 CD (2005)

Punky, mostly mid-paced BM offering from Finnish band Vordr who I think hail from Lappeenranta which is not far from the Russian border with possibly one member from Jyväskylä. The band's sound rates 11 on a scale of 0 to 10 for paint-stripping capability and the singing, though high-pitched and on the thin side, is almost as abrasive. Production is basic which

suits the group's garage rock approach well: most songs begin and end with untidy guitar scree or static, and melodies are noted more for their raw energy than for being catchy or in any way memorable. If you like your BM to be straightforward and no-nonsense with few or no Romantic musical tendencies sometimes found in other BM, and harsh-noisy and eardrum-piercing to boot, then this second album from Vordr should fit those requirements.

The CD sleeve has gorgeous black-and-white photos of forest landscapes: very still and sometimes dark and brooding. The lyrics, dark and despairing in expression and alluding to past acts of violence, make frequent references to nature.

JENNIFER HOR

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Solar Anus

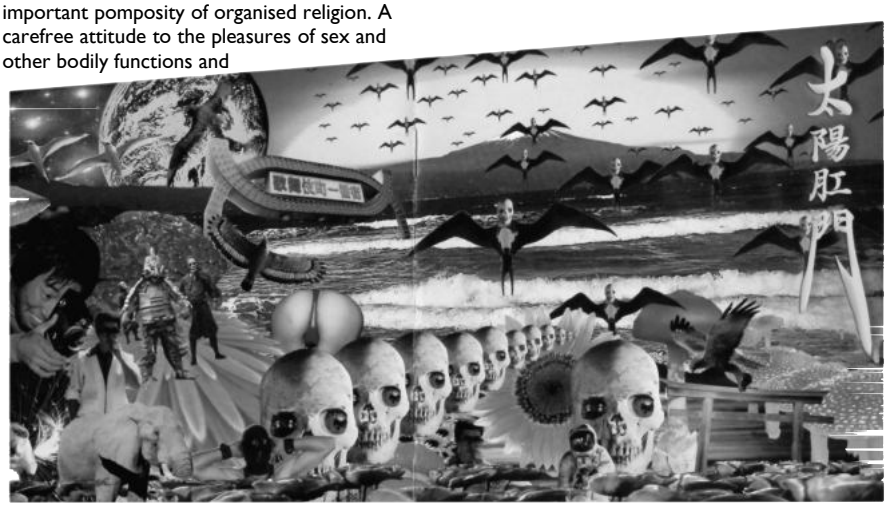
Skull Alcoholic: The Complete Solar Anus
USA TUMULT RECORDS NO NUMBER 2 x CD (2006)

Double set consisting of three albums released over 1997 – 2000. Quite good music featured here but overall I find this is hit-or-miss and, as it progresses, often not very inspired and actually rather mechanical. The Solar Anus modus operandi combines doom metal and stoner hard rock with an irreverent attitude to create heavy riff-driven music, minimalist in form and style and occasionally featuring some good melodies and guitar runs, that strives to achieve a transcendental spiritual state without the self-important pomposity of organised religion. A carefree attitude to the pleasures of sex and other bodily functions and their celebration also features as a major theme - as if you couldn't already guess from the packaging and the sleeve art of all three albums reproduced in the CD booklet. The first CD, combing the first album and part of the second album, is mostly all doom metal / stoner rock music that sometimes becomes 1970s-styled rock boogie (as on track 6 'Living Hell') and apart from the lyrics sung in Japanese and a few quiet ambient effects created with traditional Japanese folk instruments there isn't much to indicate the band's country of origin. I'm a bit surprised to find myself wishing at times that a Makoto Kawabata could appear at critical moments to provide some orgasmic firework guitar displays to liven up some of the more lumbering passages. On occasions where a trancey uplifting state is achieved (as on the 6th or 7th minute of 'Electric Jellyfish'), the band tends to flog the music for all its worth which tends to spoil enjoyment.

The second disc, containing the rest of the second original album and the third album, emphasises the spiritual angle much more than the first disc: minimalist, highly rhythmic (alas meaning very mind-numbingly repetitive techno-style beats are also featured) and mostly instrumental pieces appear. The first track 'Enemy Disappear' rehashes the style of UK doom metal / stoner rock band Cathedral circa early 1990s complete with comic Lee Dorrian impersonations, snail-paced subterranean Sabbath riffs and an air of decay and dread; incidentally I find this piece encapsulates the SA mission perfectly. There's still quite a lot of seventies hard rock which is starting to seem like a default state for the solar anal ones from which they launch forays into tribalistic, beats-driven trance rock reminiscent of Amon Düül II but the music is not very flowing, perhaps because it is too grounded in the inflexible rhythms. I get the impression that SA have boxed themselves by their musical choices which don't permit them to achieve their grand ambitions; certainly later tracks like 'Meat Pressure' tend to suggest they have exhausted their creative options if not their sense of fun and I wonder whether this is the real reason the band was short-lived. When the whole set ends, I feel rather relieved at having got through it all and I'm rather sad that so much potential as suggested by the band's ambition and style of music seems unrealised.

JENNNIFER HOR

www.tumult.net



BLACK SUNN O))) ENSEMBLE

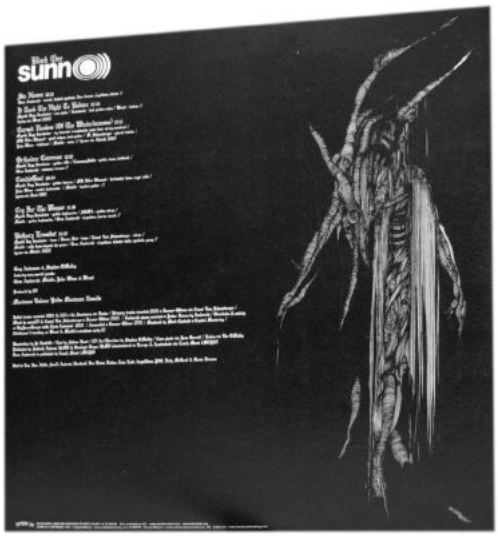
SunnO)))
Black One
USA SOUTHERN LORD SUNN50 CD (2005)
SunnO)))
Solstitium Fulminate: Live at Roskilde 0705
USA SOUTHERN LORD SUNN50.5 CD (2005)

Definitely the droney duo's best full-length recording and by welcome coincidence their most accessible and radio-friendly for those yet to embrace the Way of Drone Doom. *Black One* sure leaves the Sunn men's previous albums like *White1* and *White2* wilting in the shadows. (Huh? Don't remember those two records? Neither do I.) Whereas previous recordings might have sounded repetitive and maybe unfinished to some (not that the Sunn concept of creating music ever bothered me much but many of their pieces do seem like extended intros going nowhere), the tracks here now sound very full-bodied and embrace depths darker and more sinister than those plumbed even in the cosmos of Black Metal, territory the Sunn ones love (just look at the black metal records released on North ... I mean, Southern Lord) but until now not yet explored. This is due in part to contributions from various collaborators like current kings of the San Francisco BM scene Leviathan and Xasthur, electro-noisenik John Wiese, the reliable Mathias Schneeburger and (how could I have left him for last?), the BM expert from Metropolis in Melbourne himself: Oren Ambarchi!

A major factor that lifts The Black One far, far above its predecessors (or if you prefer, far, far below in Grimm-ness) is atmosphere and in this respect I single out two tracks: 'It Took The Night To Believe' in which Leviathan lord Wrest fights through a thick fog of blackness and wintry riffing just to be heard; and a reworking of Norwegian BM band Immortal's 'Cursed Realms (Of The Winterdemons)' whose groaning guitar and other noises remind me of the famous news story about the commercial jetliner flying through severe blizzards over the Andes Mountains only to crash into whiteness, leaving the hapless passengers to survive by their wits ... After these sterling pieces, it's pretty much back to Sunn business as usual with John Wiese's casketronics and Ambarchi's guitars and assorted percussion adding layers of sonic texture to the gritty instruments of Mystik Fogg Invokator and MK Ultra Blizzard (or whatever he calls himself: he's got four other metal monickers on this album). The last track, 'Bathory Erzsebet', a homage to the late Quorthon of Swedish 80s metal band Bathory and to the Blood Countess herself, is a sprawling riff monster touched up with Ambarchi's percussion and various background effects but above all dominated by Xasthur man Malefic singing and breathing (hyperventilating?) into his microphone while stuck in a pine coffin inside a hearse. His vocal performance is very dry and rattley and not surprisingly sounds terrified.

The bonus CD that came with my copy of *Black One* features two recordings of a live performance at Roskilde in Denmark during

SunnO)))'s European summer tour in 2005, both mixed and edited by Ambarchi who along with Attila Csihar and Tos Nieuwenhuizen accompanied the Grimm Ones. The entire CD is very, very different from *Black One* and other SunnO))) recordings I've heard so far: the first track is a sonic



universe collapsing in on itself and then reborn with Csihar enacting the agonising birth pangs. This man has really become quite adept in a glossolalic throat-singing style all his own: screams, groans, keening, death rattles, piercing cries, mysterious chanting in long-forgotten ancient languages - he does it all with style! The guitars groan and heave like out-of-tune bagpipes. The second track 'Vlad Tepes' (ha! another homage of sorts) seems to be some kind of shamanistic ritual, not unlike some secret Tibetan Buddhist ceremony known only to senior monks. Gradually the piece becomes very concentrated and intense with music steadily rhythmic as though breathing in time with the cosmic rhythm while high-pitched whistles swarm overhead. As the music throbs, Csihar seems to fall into a trance and the musicians follow his cries and whispers, building up towards a climax in which spaceships are sure to collide and explode but which actually passes quickly once reached: not earth-shattering as might be expected but the journey was more important than the destination which turned out to be nihilism.

I rate the live CD as far superior to *Black One* but it's only available with the first 200 copies of the CD; even so, as it is *Black One* is very strong and consistent. When the result is music that is so deep and powerful and so incredibly beautiful, the campy aspects like Malefic, John Wiese and SOMA taking their turns in the coffin and the hilarious rumour about Oren Ambarchi and Sin Nanna of Striborg being the same person - Ambarchi has a track 'Sin Nanna' on *Black One* - don't seem so embarrassing or silly after all. I've already warned Ambarchi someone may turn up at Metropolis with a make-up kit to give him that panda bear look. It would be great too if SOMA and the Mystik One could release more live SunnO))) recordings as independent releases on CD and vinyl.

JENNIFER HOR

Southern Lord: www.southernlord.com
Stephen O'Malley: www.ideologic.org

ATOMS OF PURE NOISE

Darkness Be Damned, Release your Hold Over Man!

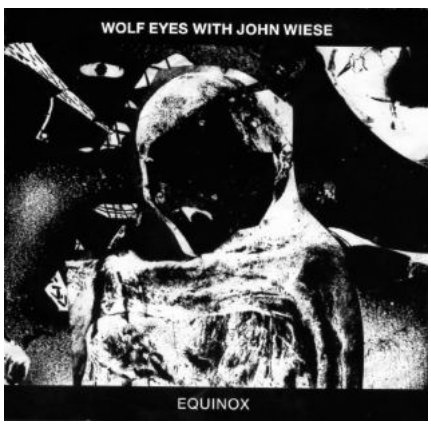
Wolf Eyes with John Wiese

Equinox

USA TRONIKS TRO-237 CD (2006)

Growing on me, is this 44-minute 'epic' slab of quietly devastating sound-art-noise. (There is a bonus track, so trivial that I intend to ignore it). The main event is a growler, but never once does it let rip with the usual murderous, bone-crushing violence of the intensity you normally associate with the muscular 'Wolfers' guys, who seem have to forsaken their earlier 'shocking' strategy. Indeed in places it slides like a metal glider into the icy, soaring stratospheric realms of sound claimed by Bastard Noise, one of Wiese's many aliases. Episodic, this *Equinox* proposes many different segments and blocks all glued together (or roughly held in place by steel bolts) into a relentless, single thing, yet containing the same vaguely pulsing rhythm of doom and death all the way through it. This hypnotic method, always good stand-by in this area, has the intended compelling results, and you gradually lose control of your faculties as the sound leads you on an angst-ridden field march through unknown turf, filled with twilight terrors.

The insert contains a striking image, so strong that it is repeated as a mini-poster which appears as you unfold said insert to its full size. Once unfolded, you'll have in your hands a powerful, stark image of a Golem or a Cyclops, or some such other unfortunate monster, rendered by collage art and ink and fitting very much in the German Expressionist style. *Equinox* is clearly a soundtrack for the pitiful existence of this wretched beast, whose doom it is to stalk the earth blinded, lame, and friendless, and the sounds on this CD depict his sad march across the filthy globe that has rejected him. A very worthy update on the Black Sabbath song 'Iron Man' (itself not far from a deep archetype of alienation), and one which I approve. Never a shriek, never a thump, never a howl of complaint do we hear from this lumbering, ugly pariah; simply a resigned, numbed, inertness, his weary footfalls pulsing, step after step.



ED PINSENT 14/10/2006

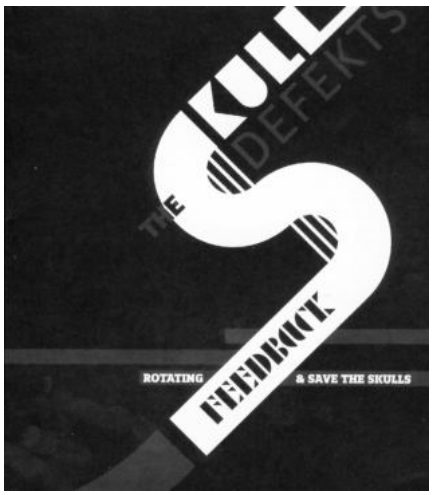
www.iheartnoise.com

The Skull Defekts

Rotating Feedback and Save The Skulls

SWEDEN iDEAL RECORDINGS / A DOUBLE A iDEAL036 / AA05 CD (2005)

Excellent! Two of the finest 'roaring' Swedes ever to have walked along the shores of the Kattegat Sea get it together with this single 39-minute slab of blasting feedback! Joachim Nordwall is from Alvars Orkester, and Henrik Rylander had an alarming release of paranoid noise (*Formation*) on Firework Edition in 2003. Together, they pump out a grisly bucket of thick black marmalade with enough low-end to loosen every single one of your tendons and sinews and snap them clean off your bones! Impressive how much near-surgical precision there is in this



work, unlike most untamed and shrieking table noise. Throb-throb-throb…they pound it out like the relentless four steamrollers of the Apocalypse flattening out the deadly tarmac, until the noise enters your skull casing and starts to fight its way out from the inside. As you undergo this painful process, the full meaning of this band's name will hit home. Recorded in 2005 in Göteborg, a Swedish University city known for its enlightened, scientific approach to noise. Amazingly, The Skull Defekts created this cruncher with just mixing desks and one microphone. That's the power of feedback and amplification for you, especially in the hands of irresponsible death-dealing maniacs like these. Limited 200-copy CDR in a striking red and black card wallet. A lovely beast. Lets just hope they don't take up ice hockey, or the whole world will be doomed!

ED PINSENT 17/10/2006

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www.a-double-a.com
www.skulldfx.com

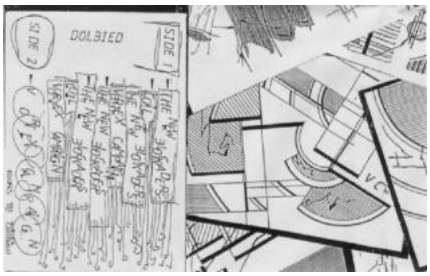
Coil / The New Blockaders / Vortex Campaign

The Melancholy Mad Tenant
UK BLACK ROSE RECORDINGS
BRCD 05-1007 CD (2005)

Impressive, and presumably quite 'rare' material rescued from 1983 and 1984, remastered and reissued in fine form on this 500-copy limited CD. Yes, it's an unholy collaboration between Coil, The New Blockaders, and Vortex Campaign. They originally did a couple of untitled collaborations – how they met, whether they met, and what they did is a mystery – and had them released on a cassette in Belgium called (unofficially) *Dolbied.* 50 copies only of that release were made; it's regarded highly by those who know about this sort of thing, as it 'showcases two of the most influential groups in the scene at the early stages of their development'. Fortunately, I managed to find a copy of the original sleeve art (top, right) and present it for your perusal.

This happened at a time when Coil (still in their first year for formation) comprised John Balance, Peter Christopherson and J.Gosling, and TNB (one year after their earth-shattering debut LP, *Changez Les Blockeurs*) were still the two Rupenus brothers. As I've said on numerous occasions, this segment of English underground is not quite in my line, but I do like the pedigree of this odd artefact, and initial impressions have yielded a very distinct, if disquieting, listening experience…negative, almost anonymous, automated noise-art. It both baffles and repels, yet you can't help but keep listening to it. I certainly found it getting under my skin in about 10-15 minutes, and that's more than you can say for a dose of Nurofen. Genuinely primitive looped tapes (this use of loops is inspired) and something approximating sex magick in its grungy, repetitious abstractions. Very redolent of 'that' period somehow and a rare vintage from that genuine UK underground cru. Insistent, obsessive repetition; it made England what it is today! Superficially, it seems as though Richard Rupenus was taking control on those two collaborative efforts, although his familiar mechanised attack was tempered to some degree by some evil-sounding peepy electronics and alien tape-loops, that pull things in quite another way. This is quite some way from the slightly friendlier disco-darkoid rich sound that Coil would develop some five years later, although TNB stayed pretty much in the same place.

Vortex Campaign are unknown to me. They could be two brothers who share the surname Verstraete and are probably Belgians. They appeared in collaged form on the 1987 LP *The Impossible Humane*. After those two main-event untitled collab tracks described above, the rest of this CD belongs to Vortex Campaign. In fact, it contains their entire back catalogue! One of them is a five-minute excerpt from their contribution to the 1983 compilation tape, *Slaughter of The Innocent*; I have the vague impression that particular private-press release was in some way notorious and/or very influential. VC also provide two otherwise



unreleased horrors, 'The Melancholy Mad Tenant' parts 1 and 2. Have skimmed through these three tracks, and gotta admit VC are thoroughly groovy. Cold, eerie, primitive electronics and tape-loops are their speciality; their sound is redolent of malfunctioning robots in a bleak sci-fi setting. These episodes of hand-knitted avant-electroacoustic experiments are a most fitting addition to this reissue. Well done Black Rose Recordings, for providing access to this material and doing a good remastering job also. I've since found unfortunately that this CD was sent to me in October 2005 and it's long since sold out at source.

ED PINSENT 15/10/2006

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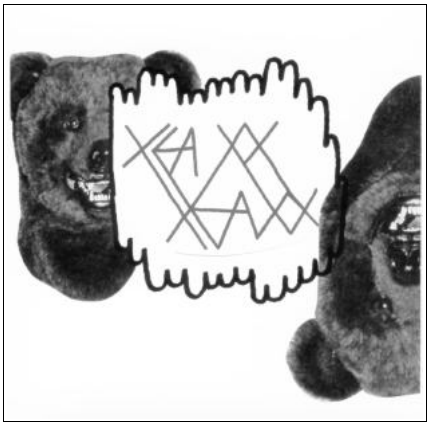
Hans Grüsel's Kränkenkabinet

Happy As Pitch
USA C.I.P. CD017 CD (2006)

A CD of overloaded, dense, layered and frankly zany electronic and instrumental malarkey that totally fits its name – a kabinet of kuriosities and very kranky too! Given that 'krank' literally means 'sick' in German, and I think a 'Krankenhouse' used to be the place wherein you would house mentally ill Germans, then this CD might have connotations not only of insanity but also of a medicine cabinet, probably in this instance packed with plenty of lethal hallucinogenic drugs. Hans Grüsel, if we can believe the laconic press release, is indeed an ex-patriate German but is currently based in San Francisco, and doing well in the Bay Area and Seattle; his radical musical inventions apparently brought him nothing but trouble in his homeland, whereas open-minded dwellers on the West Coast have welcomed his outrageousness.

Hans revenges himself on his homeland with this release, clearly determined to wreak similar havoc in the Americas. Sonically, the opening 15-



20 minutes are the busiest, overloaded with scads of off-key, out-of-control analogue synth 'gronks' and insane sequencer patterns that must have been programmed by a drug-addled loon, said sounds all sitting up to their collective neck in a swamp of pure squelch. These were played by the leaders 'Hans' and 'Gretel', presumably now a long way from their gingerbread house, with help from such luminaries as Loach Fillet (a gifted creator who also provided the kranky cover art), Liz Allbee, the Californian trumpet player (see her own amazing CD this ish, and contributions to Porest CDs), Robi Kauker, Marielle Jakobsons, and many others – including a classical chamber quintet at the end of the record! Forget such phrases as 'everything but the kitchen sink' and start thinking in terms of 'entire bathroom extensively remodelled' and a new extension too...

The record is divided into three suites, 'Happy', 'As', and 'Pitch', each containing a slew of lesser titles within their carcasses, although this naming scheme won't help to orient you in the general confusion and alarm. In places, especially during the second of the three 'suites', this record is every bit as dense as anything you may have heard from the Biota / Mnemonists crew. The 3rd suite 'Pitch' sees the chamber players joining in with the electronic players, to produce a combination which, to say the least, is extremely striking. The opening passage 'Happy' is simply noisy, zany, fun. There are more analogue synths here than you can find for less than a thousand dollars on eBay; not just Moog systems, but Rolands and Korgs, and in addition overamped guitars, excessive electronics, wild percussion, and mayhem galore. It's a battleground, electric and acoustic instruments vying for space in a free-for-all wrassling tussle where the producer has abandoned any hope of acting like a referee.

Only in one place – with its ludicrous version of that annoying period popular song, here retitled 'Tea Für Two' – does this record get a little too wacky for its own good, because for the most part it's crammed with rich goodies of twisted electronic pleasure. A title like 'Common Housefly Symphony' should clue you in to the mischievous contents of the Kränkenkabinet, its delight in pestilence and corruption... its very title suggests some form of wallowing in black gold, a forbidden pleasure, and not too far from a Grimms fairy tale whose title escapes me right now but which involves a good daughter getting covered in gold and a badly-behaved daughter being covered in black tar. The cover artworks likewise seem to me a manic update on The Brothers Grimm, by way of Edward Gorey – and to help matters, their twisted lineworks are printed white on black! So, the next time you need a powerful antidote to common sense, reach for the contents of this Kabinet.

ED PINSENT 12/08/2006

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Heavy Seals

Jazz Bust

USA TRONIKS TRO-198 CDEP (2005)

Brilliant little miniature of abrasive and bizarre noise; costs less than a package of dynamite, yet will demolish more. It's John Wiese teaming up with Brace Paine (man of many side projects, including The Gossips and Die Monitr Batss), released on Phil Blankenship's label, and together they find they can say all that's needful on the geophysical state of the world today in just 15 minutes and eleven short cuts. The centre-piece cut is an extended bout of live horror-noise captured from some sweaty underground bloodbath, featuring chunks of metal being tortured, scraped and pushed about in the midst of a semi-acoustic whining hell. Like so much noise music, it conveys much heat, very little light. Either side of this central 'panel', you get edited fragments from the sonic diaries of Heavy Seals documenting their escapades, which range from brewing vats of dark electronic swill to issuing whoops of zany noise at a lawn party, along with an afternoon of fun spent reducing entire cities to smouldering ruins of shrieking noise, and digging up ashcans full of semi-sampled garbage to feed to the neighbourhood pigeons. Just their normal working week. These extracts are arranged randomly without planning, warnings, or context, in such wise as to maximise befuddlement. This strategy is echoed by the placement of brilliantly inconsequential images on the sleeve. A total anti-entertainment package from top to bottom, a short and sweet power-punch of noise and madness!

ED PINSENT 25/07/2006

www.iheartnoise.com

Henrik Rylander and Leif Elggren

Gottesdienst

SWEDEN iDEAL RECORDINGS iDEAL039 CD (2006)

We last heard from Henrik in 2003, charging out at full speed with his brutal *Formation* CD for Firework Edition. Here, with arch-prankster Leif by his side, he creates an alarming racket which is guaranteed to cause consternation and terror among the listening populace. Loops of orchestral music samples (perhaps realised by way of a sampling keyboard) are hammered home remorselessly, scattered with fragments from a grim spoken-word recordings…on top of this hideous assemblage, Henrik adds his characteristic touches: amplified thumping, solid blocks of computer-based noise, and unacceptably intense feedback. It's inhuman! Masochists who endure this sort of thing on a daily basis may find it interesting to compare Rylander's brand of noise with that of, say, John Wiese – compared with whom, the Swede has zero sense of fun or abandon. To him it's just an unpleasant chore that must be completed at all costs, working with sweat and tears through many painful barriers. This work is described inside the erudite sleeve note as 'chamber music'…well yes, if you mean a torture chamber! 40 minutes of pain and darkness, delivered through such crude surgical methods as sawing, drilling, and hammering, and stapling limbs together with fencing wire. That's the comparatively lively track 1. Track 2 is not lively at all, but simply a monolith of noise, no less grey or alarming; while the steely oceanic temperament of track 3 likewise provides little comfort. A grim and grisly horror of nightmarish proportions. However, I should add it's a massive improvement on recent projects associated with Leif, which seem ineffectual and directionless compared to this determined granite-blasting thomp. For more of Henrik's screeches, see also The Skull Defekts, above.

ED PINSENT 28/08/2006

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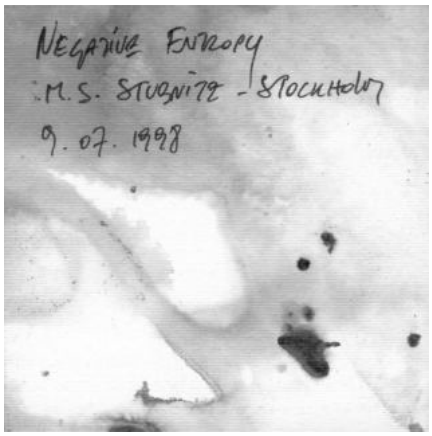

Michael Prime / Geert Feytons

Negative Entropy

ABSURD #46 / UTAN TITEL #3 CD

Michael Prime (Morphogenesis) and Geert Feytons (Noise-Maker's Fifes) met on the M.S. Stubnitz, which is that experimental music and art boat, in Stockholm in 1998. This bizarre sound-art workout resulted, 47 minutes of continual noise taped direct from the mixing desk on that Swedish floating hull of avant-weirdness. *Negative Entropy* is a highly puzzling, claustrophobic and (at times) quite terrifying blast of metallic menace, existing in a rather gaseous cloud-like form. One of the oddest things from nature-lover Prime in a long time, although his blue-sleeved gatefold LP *Requiem* for Die Stadt is also filled with a certain screeching terror in likewise disembodied shape. To us listeners, the sense of imminent dread on this record will nearly curdle our bowels, but to the performers I expect it's just another piece of pure process. It's also totally baffling in that there are no clues as to how they realised this sound, creating a mystery to rank with the disappearance of the crew of the *Marie Celeste*. The sleeve art approximates the effects of white paint flaking away from rusted metal, which is just what I'd expect to see if I ever signed up for a term of service on board that performance-art tugboat of doom (some survivors, with a

haunted look in their eye, call it the 'Black Freighter' of sound art). Metallic, groany, sea-faring material; both art and sound are a tribute to the joys of gradual decay, both physical and metaphysical.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2006

www.void.gr/absurd

Robert Piotrowicz

Rurokura and the Final Warn

POLAND emd.pl/records 004 CD (2005)

A totally excellent burst of dynamite noise-blasting in the electro-acoustic 'art' mode! In four tracks and 33 minutes, Piotrowicz does indeed deliver a grim 'warn' - an apocalyptic narrative laced with urban paranoia, fear and hate. The opening cut depicts a huge crowd of panicked citizens, all shouting in fear and confusion. They struggle to be heard among a cloud of electronic noise, the 'humanity' of their voices leeched away by Piotrowicz's cruel processes. For the remainder of record, those troubled voices drop away, to be replaced by short and powerful episodes of pure, throbbing, intense noise chugs. Plenty of dynamics,

textures, ideas, and development – but it never forgets to be relentless. The cataclysm hinted at during the opening moments is slowly spreading across the globe. The last track depicts total devastation – a day of heavy bombardment and explosions. Stern, grim and brilliant music; some clues and hints in the track titles too, suggestive of dystopian futures and a paranoid thriller story, presented in short film-like episodes. A treatise on nuclear war or chemical gas death or a howitzer blast in the face.

Piotrowicz has been a 'name' on the Polish front for at least ten years, running the Musica Genera festival of improvised and experimental music there and also a label of same name. This fine work comes from 2004, created using analogue synth and tapes and mastered by Werner Dafeldecker. Packaged by the turbo-sociologist Michal Kopaniszyn in a fab clear-vinyl wallet printed with blood-red streaks and gashes, this release is a total must-have item! Who is Rurokura? When will the Final Warn arrive? And if it does, will we take heed?

ED PINSENT 23/07/2006

http://www.emd.pl/records/index.php

Origami Replika

Kommerz

SWEDEN SEGERHUVA SEGER3 CD (2006)

Origami Replika are but one part of the Origami art collective from Norway and are now defunct, but on this 1997 recording they were Tore Honore Bøe, Mads Staff Jensen, and Lasse Marhaug. *Kommerz* was created entirely out of Merzbow back catalogue material. The project was planned for release elsewhere and must have been stalled for some time until Segerhuva picked it up. Normally these collaboration / remix 'projects' are disastrous affairs and even more surprisingly those involving Merzbow often appear less satisfying to my ears than his solo productions, yet here is something quite brilliant. An intense, hour-long coherent sound-art statement served up over a dozen excellent instalments. Origami Replika have sunk their drill and piped a barrel of crude Merzbow right out of the ground. Somehow the overall ugliness and harsher qualities of the Japanese noise-demon have been boiled away, leaving behind this clean, intense, skeleton of power in patterned shards and smoothly resonating energy-fields that extend for 100 acres. As you can tell, it's possible to assess the extent of this music using many different systems of weights and measures.

Noise, drones, music and bird sounds from his 'animal' records – all these Merzbow components have been re-distilled and reframed in the light of a bright northerly sun, and recast to bring forth new meanings; Japanese characters reinscribed as Nordic runes. Origami Replika have totally inhabited Merzbow's alien universe without fear, annexing great swathes of it for their own population, migratory uses, and development of local farming techniques. Former excess has been replaced with just the right dose of death-dealing, mind-warping noise. Where Merzbow once proposed forms of dazzling mesmerism, there now stands a steely monument to clarity of vision and planning. I seem to be saying the Norwegians are to Merzbow what the pilgrim settlers were to the Native Americans, but that's not what I had in mind. The title *Kommerz* alludes to the original Dada source of Merzbow's name created from found detritus by Kurt Schwitters. Amazingly, this is on Segerhuva, a label which has exasperated me in the past with its retrograde caste and unreconstructed attitude, but this one passes muster.

ED PINSENT 25/07/2006

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www.segerhuva.se

LHD

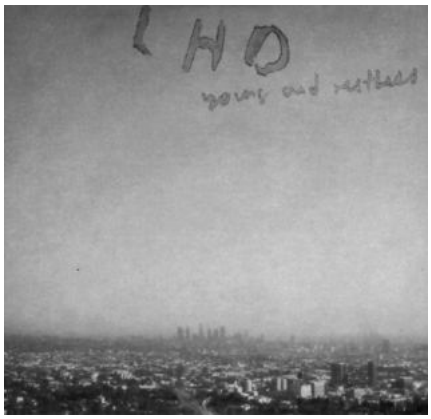
Young and Restless

USA BLOSSOMING NOISE BN003CD CD (2005)

This is John Wiese with Phil Blankenship of The Cherry Point, the latter artiste one whose work needs investigation by myself; a collaborative enterprise which may have been realised some time ago, now released by a USA micro label whose catalogue is packed with cool sold-out goodies; and it's a short 16 minute blast of old school table-noise. Unlike Merzbow's art which is packed with dynamics, patterns, ideas and subtexts, *Young and Restless* is just a meaningless slab of relentless roar, a heavy torrent of raw filth. Like a lot of similar material, its aggressiveness can only be curbed by not playing it in the first place (the volume control won't help you), and its effects on your inner being can only be destructive. Heartily recommended in other words. Check in now and absorb a good hearty slab of cancerous horror, to be wedged painfully into the pink matter between your auditory orifices.

ED PINSENT 11/07/2006

www.blossomingnoise.com



Poochlatz

Victims of Self-Preservation

ISRAEL MAOR APPELBAUM MAP0O3 CD (2006)

Amongst all the noize, drone, psychfolk mist and black metal that have been buzzing in my head lately, Israeli noise duo Poochlatz are currently doing their damnedest to rise above my internal / eternal sonic beehive with a crazed and screechy Whitehouse / Merzbow-influenced style all their own. Vocalist Rani Zager rages incoherently about all kinds of things (like needing a glass of water and some honey drops perhaps) and main man Maor Appelbaum delights in torturing him with keyboard electronics, static, speaker feedback and, on two tracks, high-pitched clarinet which add a mournful tone. Track 5, 'Note to Myself', is a highly distorted, static-filled piece that may owe something to black metal (and I note Burzum is an influence on the duo) in which a sample of some cheesy Middle Eastern movie music appears fleetingly for comic effect. However, for me the stand-out tracks are the first and last tracks which feature sampled spoken word passages in Hebrew: opener 'Black Milk' in

particular is right on the edge of apocalyptic hysteria as the speaker, sounding at times a little like an English vicar and most of the time a lot like a nutty self-deluded, self-proclaimed messiah, goes up and down in mood and almost starts gabbling as he approaches his moment of self-crucifying truth.

In among the extreme power electronics and Zager's constant complaining (all very heavily distorted so we never find out what sticks in his craw figuratively), Applebaum takes care to shape the music and keep it flowing; this is especially apparent in the latter half of the album where the chaos, screeching and static are being channelled towards an end (not necessarily a cathartic or pyrotechnic one) and in the process some very frightening and disturbing sonic tableaux crackle and fuzz into being. This is a well-crafted album, inspired in parts (who'd have thought of a klezmer instrument as a weapon of noize?), and while not totally original and maybe in need of an over-arching theme to direct the music so that it is less scatter-shot and more powerful and concentrated, gives evidence of thought about composition, ambience and mood. So much noize music these days is all about genocide, torture, degradation, manipulation and their effects on the human psyche and as Israelis Poochlatz have to address such themes at some point in their career, but I'd like to see them also tackle issues and problems about life in Israel, of which there are many: the corruption in politics and the resulting loss of public faith in political institutions and values, the increasing poverty and the weakening of social welfare, the continuing racial prejudice against Ethiopian Jews and Jews of Middle Eastern background ... so many problems and you notice I haven't even mentioned the 'P' word ...

JENNIFER HOR

Poochlatz: www.myspace.com/poochlatz
poochlatz@gmail.com
Maor Appelbaum: www.maorappelbaum.com

Additional Tasty Noisettes

From France we have **Vomir** with a homemade CDR which may be called *Misanthropic harshvomit thrown at Maison Bruit* although that may simply be a description of the sound and its circumstances. It's one of the most primitive, basic and vile pieces of harsh noise I've ever heard. I absolutely love it! He proudly describes himself as an 'aural blistering French atrocity', and runs his own label Period Rec putting out tapes and CDRs in editions of 5-10 copies. Vomir means 'To Vomit' of course, and I think this is what approximates the sound we hear – close-miked sounds emanating from an extremely unwell oral cavity, with resulting recordings quite possibly slowed down to make them even more repellent. Perhaps a species of internal body-based sound poetry to rank with Henri Chopin. Certainly makes a change from the usual feedback and mixing desk racket. Might be hard to find, but try www.maisonbruit.com, place an order, put whatever comes through the mail in your hi-fi, and run a mile. PS: I have since corresponded with Vomir by email. "That is an old release," he writes, referring to the work above. "I do work now in a different direction, harsh noise wall, as we call it. If you know work by the Cherry Point or the Rita (monolithic pure harsh noise), it is the way I do." To prove it, he sent me two further atrocities, one called *Encore* which has a nice skull cover, and the other called *Adoration of the Faceless Woman* (MILITANT WALLS #08), a split CDR with **Paranoid Time**. The latter has an excellent 'gothic novel' styled engraving cover. I may need to spend more time with these, but they appear to be little more than unlistenable full-on power electronics and sound exactly the same as a thousand other noise projects, totally lacking the voice elements which made the first thing so original in my eyes. Still, he's convinced of the value of his artistic development. (EP)

Testicle Hazard's *Beauty of Nature* (FREAK ANIMAL RECORDS FREAK-CD-035) is just 46 minutes of plain old noise, from the great Lasse Marhaug with T Keranen, both playing electronic devices at a table-top and Lasse occasionally yawping into a microphone. They did it at the Avanto Festival in 2005, and in their roaring work you will discern neither beauty nor nature in the conventional sense, simply spiky ugliness and the wonderful contrivances that can be had with mixing desks and feedback. A glorious retro racket that never lets up for one second, giving you a constant tornado blast in the mush. (EP)

John Wiese presents the latest (and hopefully the last) stage in his Magical Crystal Blah experiment, with a solo CD wherein he personally reworks all the remixed tracks from Volume Two, which were in turn derived from John Wiese solo noise-works released as Volume One. In the spirit of pure reductionism, he renders *Magical Crystal Blah Volume 3* (HELICOPTER H 37 / KITTY PLAY KPR 16) as just 17 minutes of micro-shards of sound, some of the 37 tracks lasting for mere seconds. Veering wildly from near-silence to startling electric noise, this is a near-masterpiece of impenetrable minimalism. A completely abstracted noise-hell, almost crystalline in its artistic purity, awaits the listener. (EP)

MALADROIT RHYTHMS OF R-O-C-K

The Vocokesh
Through the Smoke
USA STRANGE ATTRACTORS AUDIO HOUSE SAAH 034 CD (2005)

Now this is dreamy, expansive and atmospheric instrumental guitar psych music as it should be done: with lots of feeling and passion and above all vision and courage. The Vocokesh have been digging their own niche in psychedelic guitar rock for well over a decade and one might expect this album to sound a bit stale and to repeat the same ideas and structures throughout; and though these guys probably haven't changed their style much since their first full length recording *Ispepnaibara* (I did have that record for a while but didn't find it all that remarkable), this recent offering of fire, obviously tended and stoked with loving care, gives off no stale cigarette smoke but instead a heady and surprisingly fresh and warm aroma. The guitars have just the right amount of bright and raw distorted fuzz while retaining a crisp edge, and open up bright almost glarey sun-filled vistas between your ears and eyes through which the music, embellished with analogue keyboard sounds and adroitly placed ambient effects, can trace vast journeys in space without passing through the same point twice.

Everything the Vocokesh do here must surely have been done many times before by the likes of Faust and all their German space rock contemporaries of over thirty years ago plus all the hundreds, possibly thousands of proggy space guitar wannabee groups following in their path but surprisingly *Through the Smoke* doesn't sound at all cliched; on the contrary all the guitar licks and buzzing riffs become new and pristine, not merely reinvigorated. Even synth washes and those New Age-y donging bells on the title track, which can seem so cheesy in other musical contexts, enjoy a new lease of life (if you'll pardon the cliche) and become part of an alien world. One obvious point of comparison that comes to mind is some of Amon Düül II's early work on albums like *Phallus Dei* and *Tanz der Lemminge*, in particular the long instrumental pieces that combined rock, psychedelic and ambient elements. Quite amazing that this music can still have many hidden surprises for those who think they've heard everything there is to hear and the only things left to squeeze out of such music are irony, arty post-rock, post-psych and post-whatever. But there's nothing ironic, pretentiously arty or 'knowing' in what the Vocokesh do here, these guys do their thang with feeling and love without having to be referential except to themselves.

JENNIFER HOR

www.strange-attractors.com

Suishou no Fune
Where The Spirits Are
USA HOLY MOUNTAIN 261283 CD (2006)

A very good second album from this young band whose members, a girl and two boys, sport black shades, black clothes and long black (what else?) hair which must be de rigueur for up-and-coming psychedelic rock bands in Japan but as long as the music excels, which it does here, we don't mind at all. Suishou no Fune have a very bluesy washed-out guitar sound which complements Pirako Kurenai's howling vocals, particularly on the first track 'Vale of Spirits' on which the guitars sound incredibly massive and cavernous like giant wailing hurricanes, and also on 'Your tears drop from the sky' where Kurenai gives vent to her emotions with long plaintive cries. From then on, drummer Tail bows out and stringsters Kurenai and Kageo continue in a slower, more melancholy and foreboding vein thanks to those echoing bluesy guitars which loom throughout; titles like 'Apparition on a moonless night' and 'Black phantom' hint at dread and horror and sombre guitar passages open up unplumbed depths of darkness, sorrow and creepiness, though with the Japanese-language lyrics not translated into English, it's hard to say if the inspiration for the music derives from native Japanese horror folklore traditions or farther afield, or if the lyrics are expressing something else altogether

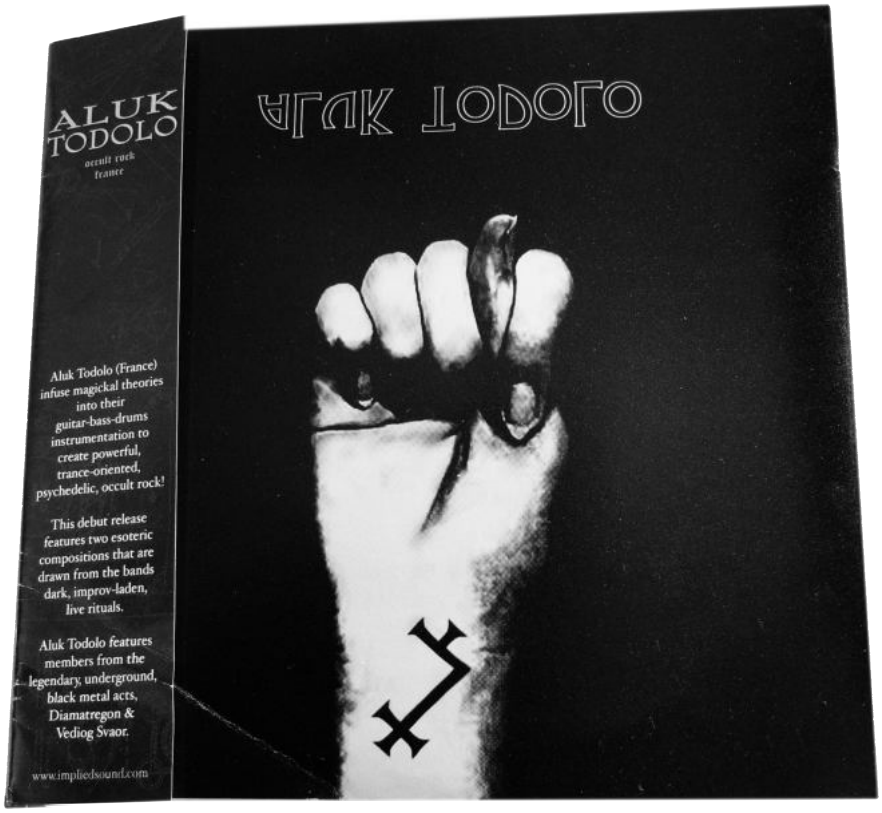
different and intangible. However there are surely few other releases this year in which guitars can at once be made to convey emotions such as sadness, desperation, fear, gloom and even hope, and produce such a huge sound that is rich and full of depth. There's definitely a lot of potential in this young group and obviously Holy Mountain label thinks so too, having picked up this album which I would have expected PSF Records, which released the band's debut album, to pick up.

JENNIFER HOR

www.holymountain.com

Zukanican
Horse Republic
UK PICKLED EGG RECORDS EGG 60 CD (2006)

If you're fed up reading about the atonal, droney noise to which we give so much coverage in TSP, you could turn to this jolly tuneful record as an antidote. Or just go back to Joni Mitchell – I normally do! This Liverpudlian bunch have plenty chops and instrumental prowess, play everything with an endearing sense of fun and a very 'quirky' flavour, and every note they blurt out is driven by an infectious, joyous beat. With the saxophones and sparing electronics, there are plenty of jazz-lite and krautrock-ish influences detectable in their sound, too. From Cleo Laine to Holger Czukay, they roam all points freely and happily, owning allegiance to no man's record collection. They're just a little bit too self-conscious, and I can't discern a clear band-wide consensus about where they want to be. The other problem is that nothing really develops; each tune just stays in one place, until



the band stop playing it. It's great in small doses though, which is why I loved their earlier 10-inch LP on this same label.

ED PINSENT 22/10/2006

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Aluk Todolo

Aluk Todolo
USA IMPLIED SOUND IS003 7" SINGLE (2006)

Terrific French 'Occult Rock' seven-incher… Aluk Todolo are a trio of French goons with electric guitar, bass and drumkit who draw their membership from Diamatregon And Vediog Svaor, and claim to 'infuse magickal theories into their instrumentation'. Black Magickal theories perhaps? Well, there are hexagrams for titles, a mystical circle symbol printed on the back cover, and a satanic hand gesture photographed on the front of a sleeve whose predominant colour range occupies the 'black' area. However, a Black Metal band this ain't – they have chops, dynamics in the volume, and they know how to vary the intensity in their favour. Although dark and intense as a piece of Green's Organic Chocolate, this record's magickal theories are more to do with trance and shamanistic flights, and these two psyched-out, high-volume, Can-esque bursts of energy will totally deliver the bacon when you feel the need to take a short out-of-body experience, loosening your soul from your body until the ectoplasm pours like three day-old yoghurt. The A side has a religious message sampled at the end in among some slushy cathedral music, while the B side is more uptempo and is driven largely by a ferocious one-note bass guitar riff. Totally transcending its apparent bleakness and despair, this is a topnotch release of 12 minutes' worth of uplifting and energising rock.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2006

ww.impliedsound.com

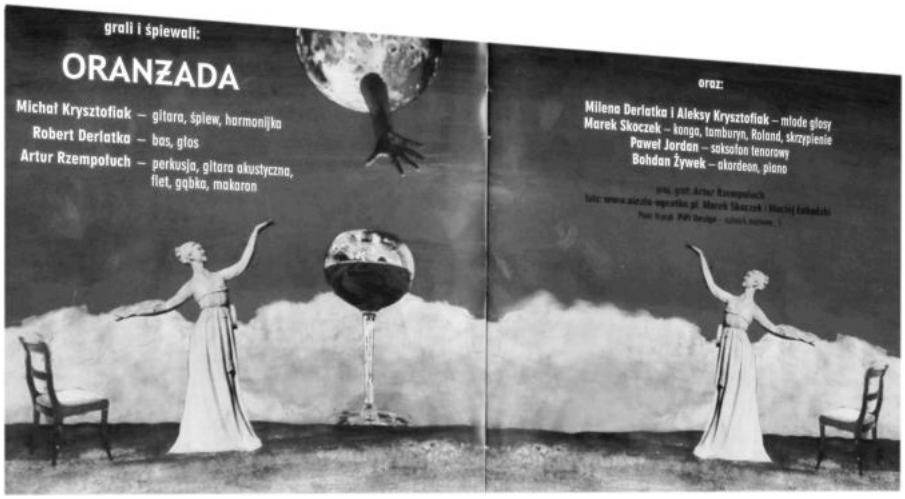
Oranzada

drzewa w sadzie zdzikty
POLAND MICRO FON RECORDS MFR 0001 CD (2006)

Excellent example of recent progressive rock music from Poland – not sure if this genre ever really went out of fashion in that country, but I have the feeling it was never discredited in quite the way it was in the UK. Well, score one for the Poles. This solid, honest rock is delivered with passion and with craft, executed by the familiar guitar, bass, drums and organ setup with guest instrumentalists providing occasional sax or percussion passages. Its melodic and jazzy tendencies will please fans of ELP, King Crimson, National Health, Quatermass and Flash; come to think of it, the vocalist even has something approaching a Greg Lake singing style, very shouty and declamatory. If I knew what his lyrics meant, I might have some clue as to why he's getting so agitated and bellowy, but clearly a deep-rooted grudge against the various iniquities and injustices of the world is indicated…the core trio are guitarist Michal Krysztofiak, bassist Robert Derlakta and drummer Artur Rzempotuch; of the three, only the drummer has retained a convincing retro 70s look, coming across like the runner-up in a Jeff Lynne lookalike competition with his offensive big hair and shades, so more credit to him. The other two guys resemble members of a clueless post-punk band from Chislehurst who saw a picture of Wire in the *NME* once. However, I shouldn't be unkind as their music is extremely entertaining, convincing, and enjoyable prog. Colour booklet is also full of semi-surreal collage pictures for you to scope out while you're digging the fast-moving twiddly melodies. Razor-sharp retro riffage which is worth investigating!

ED PINSENT 08/10/2006

www.oranzada.com



JD King & The Coachmen

American Mercury
USA ECSTATIC PEACE E#99c CD (2005)

Many of you will recall that Thurston Moore's pre-Sonic Youth activities included a stint with a New York outfit called The Coachmen and that their early bratty recordings were belatedly released in 1988 as *Failure to Thrive*.

Cartoonist and illustrator JD King was one of those first Coachmen and, twenty odd years on, plays guitar in this current four-piece incarnation. Wise-ass new wavery has long been abandoned in favour of an instrumental approach which is damn-near unclassifiable. A definite primitivism still lingers in the Coachmen sound and an appealing sense of improvising by the seat of your pants. Ghosts of 20th century American music forms float through these seventeen wordless cuts: the backwards guitar of classic garage psychedelia, the thrumming of Fahey's 12 string, Mo Tucker's tambourine and the home recording ethos of Crystalised

Movements and other Twisted Village naifs.

Some tracks hit the mark with beatific chance-meeting moments of magic. 'From across the sea' knits several shimmering Electric Prunes-like swathes of tremolo, some backwards some forwards, gently held together with trembling bass rumbles. 'Our Lady of Fatima (Mary Appears to the Children)' is an ecstatic blend of jazz drumming, incandescent crackling sheets of guitar improv and extremely spare and sensitive electric bass. One of the quietest pieces, 'Sugar Shakin'' is a gorgeous backyard meditation and 'The Port of Albany' is in the same still, hovering, after-hours vein.

Top marks also to JD King for referencing several totally un-hip American icons in the track titles. Radical conservative philosophers like James Burnham and John Morrison Birch are name-checked and American Mercury was apparently also the title of a sceptical and elitist US journal whose intellectual heyday was the 20s and 30s. When so many practitioners of the current US underground languish in lazy hepster conformity such positive crankery should definitely be welcomed!

JOHN BAGNALL

www.ectsaticpeace.com

Whitehouse

Asceticists

UK SUSAN LAWLY SLCD028 CD (2006)

Whitehouse follow up 2003's *Bird Seed* with another set of songs notable for their scouring, attack-dog energy and relentlessly hectoring lyrical style. It's their first album since the departure from the band of taboo-tickling American Peter Sotos, but his absence is noticeable only in that the album lacks one of the bleak spoken-word collages of sexual abuse victims' testimonies that were his stock-in-trade and that disrupted the flow of *Bird Seed* and 2001's *Cruise*. Otherwise, the record is of a piece with its predecessors, evincing a scalpel-sharp intelligence and a harmonic complexity that belie Whitehouse's reputation as thuggish purveyors of bludgeoning aural assaults.

Asceticists is less than half an hour long, but its righteous anger and splenetic delivery mean that the listener never feels remotely short-changed. With Whitehouse down to a duo, William Bennett and Philip Best share vocal and compositional duties between them, and their respective approaches are revealingly different. Best delivers most of the bilious, obscenity-fuelled rants in the snarling, barking tone of a psychotic rap artist. If 'Language Recovery' and 'Ruthless Babysitting' come over as vicious condemnations of Best's former bandmate Sotos, on 'Dans' it is practically impossible to discern the object of his anger. The lyric contains enough moments of directness ('Legs give way outside Asda… Picture a ballet at Sadler's Wells… Remember creeping out the Arab bookstore') to imply that Best has a definite target in mind, but specificity is held tantalisingly out of reach and finally crushed under an avalanche of seething hatred.

Bennett's own lyrical contributions on 'Guru' and 'Killing Hurts Give You The Secrets' take the form of a synthesis of everyday conversational tics with invasive philosophical inquiry. As one familiar with neurolinguistic programming, a set of techniques that aims to influence behaviour through patterns of language, Bennett is well aware of the ability of language to suggest and unsettle. Here, he exchanges his trademark guttural howl for a sober, almost hesitant form of delivery, instilling deep regret and reproachfulness into lines like 'you'll be left holding only thoughts of what could have, might have, should have been'. Only on the closing 'Dumping The Fucking Rubbish' does Bennett give full vent to his voice, with a fearsome invocation to 'rise up now… kill this fucking nightmare that is inside you.'

Musically, *Asceticists* continues Whitehouse's movement away from the crushing use of drones and frequencies, towards a compelling and highly original form of electronic harshness. The Whitehouse sound is livid and dangerous, with monstrously birthed synth noises and deranged, clattering percussion. Only on 'Guru' do the disorientating frequencies of 'classic' Whitehouse appear, forming nasty aural slaps around the head as Bennett insidiously asks 'Would you feel others would be better off without you?' Elsewhere, the heavily processed and mangled sounds shore up the brutality of the texts to perfection.

There's one final, troubling element to all of this. Bennett has written about the torture and mutilation that takes place in some parts of present-day Africa, and the *Bird Seed* track 'Cut Hands Has The Solution' made direct reference to some of these chilling practices. In the similarly fractured almost-English of this album's 'Killing Hurts Gives You The Secrets', in the African-inflected title of the instrumental piece 'Nzambi la Lufua' and in the cover lettering which picks out the artist and title in the pan-African colours of red, yellow and gold, Whitehouse make glancing, almost subliminal reference to this unimaginable cruelty. ('Nzambi la Lufua' itself is a brief, stricken instrumental, mingling disquieting percussive stabs with ghostly, metallic shards of noise.) Stalking malevolently between interiorised psychodrama and uncomfortable misanthropy, Whitehouse have once again demonstrated their mastery of the aesthetics of conflict.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.susanlawly.com

THE METAL MEN

By Rik Rawling

PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT LYRICS

A Spaceship Made From God's Bones Can Still Fall To Earth

Comets On Fire
Field Recordings from the Sun
UK SWEET NOTHING RECORDS SNCD029 CD (2002)
Comets On Fire
Blue Cathedral
USA SUB POP RECORDS SPCD 647 CD (2004)
Comets On Fire
Avatar
USA SUB POP RECORDS SPCD 704 CD (2006)

When is Prog not Prog? When it's Prog with its cock out, of course. With its genitals on full display, cheesy but throbbing, blue vein a-twitching, pubic hair frazzled by the lightning summoned down from up on high, where even the ancient weary gods can feel something stirring as the sound of Comets On Fire echoes though the void of their making.

Still, it's Prog, so all preconceptions and prejudices have to be jettisoned like redundant booster rockets as we exit the stratosphere of limited possibilities and enter a wholly different world where no-one gives a fuck anymore, where ELP is an acronym for a sexual disease and that infection has mingled with the warty fuzz of The MC5, The Stooges and premium-grade Blue Cheer and mutated into something last seen lurking in the background of a Tom Baker-era *Dr Who* episode. Despite all the ECHOOOOOOOO and ferocity this is still Prog as far as the structures and the barely-comprehensible lyrics go, and that's what stops this being what could have potentially been an amusing but quickly dismissed pastiche/homage of those already-cited influences whose bones have surely now been ground to such a fine dust that no further shamanic divination is possible? Comets On Fire seem to understand that the message inherent between the lines of 'Kick Out The Jams' is one of evolution, of the pursuit of your instinct. Of L.I.V.I.N' , as opposed to the Ugly Joy Death Dirge that now constitutes any number of download charts.

So, that band name, for starters. Unequivocal. Expressive. Loaded with intent. They are here to do damage, and you will enjoy the experience no matter how painful. You wonder why

it hasn't been used before – it's that powerful, that evocative. Comets. On Fire!!! That's going to stand out on the racks at Fopp, isn't it? And as with any great band name, the sound has to match it, otherwise you're fucked, and there's no doubt they started out with the best intentions.

Lead Comet Ethan Miller and bassist Ben Flashman launched Comets in 1999, coming straight outta Santa Cruz and into a rock landscape that was undergoing a long-overdue metamorphosis. Behind the façade of irony metal and the emergent 'post rock' scene, strange new creatures were squirming in the sonic amnion, waiting for the moment to explode into the world in a hail of blood and funky juices. Miller had the right attitude from the get-go: 'We wanted to do something musically that was hurtful...' They succeeded, but not without trials. 'Things don't come easily to Comets, we have to work for it,' said Miller. 'But I think that does pay off because there isn't a lot of fat and hot dogs on the albums; they're pretty mowed down to precisely what we want to keep or have represent us.'

And so, here's *Field Recordings From The Sun* – a good title, part Alpha Centauri, part nod to the aging Stoner/Space crowd who hated Monster Magnet for making Powertrip. It's a trip, for sure, and a hard ride for the uninitiated. The band give no warning and come out of the traps blazing, with 'Beneath The Ice Age', which soon destroys the misleading bells and bongwater-hums into in a hail of pile-driving bass and bewildering alien fuzz. What is making this noise? That voice – howling and hooting – sounds vaguely human, and the skronk could only be the product of someone whose muse is doomed to be forever caught on the rack between *Interstellar Space*-era Coltrane and 'Blow Steve Blow!' Mackay, but what's made them do this, not only to the audience, but to themselves?

The line-up has changed since their first self-titled release, (described by their own press as 'Metamphetamine and schnapps-drenched hippie tunes take it straight into the sonic shit storm.') with Ben Chasny of Six Organs of Admittance joining to add a certain Plutonian gravity to the proceedings, along with new drummer Utrillo Belcher, whose name suggests he was on the run from a low budget sequel to Spinal Tap. Both give their all, but it's

Chasny who proves the most vital new ingredient to the festering stew, hauling them back from the void with his innate ear for the tune, before they collectively pin him down and riff him like he's never been riffed before. Track after track, they start off in one direction, only to succumb to their most unhinged impulses.

'Return to Heaven'. Does Heaven want them back? Why did they leave in the first place? Were they forcibly ejected, exiled forever, for playing the Devil's music? If so, it only proves that once again The Eternal Adversary has got all the best tunes. On 'The Unicorn' the Comet's attempt to condense the entirety of *Led Zep III* into one wayward song, a feedback-engorged homage to excess, soaked in all the sweat from Robert Plant's crotch during the year 1973.

'ESP' is TNT. 'The Black Poodle' is the Barghest, the mythical hound of darkness, that haunts the dead spaces, revealing itself only to those who are shortly to experience a bereavement. In this case, the HOOOOOWWL it unleashes will kill only your innocent notions of what 'rock' is all about. The band, already operating at ramming speed, going into over-drive, everything cranked, everything hung low, everything giving off sparks.

As Ethan Miller later said of that album, 'It's like here's a riff, here's the vocals, and just blaze it as hard as you can for as long as you fucking can until you've mowed down everything.'
Mission accomplished. How to follow it?

Try *Blue Cathedral*. 'Blue' as in morose, melancholic or sad? Nope, 'blue' as in Blue Cheer. Yes, they'd already managed to combine RFTB, Hawkwind, MC5 and even the trashcan gravity of The Nova's 'The Crusher' on their previous albums but here, it's all about tryin' to out-do the Blue, to go beyond their Stygian Swamp-blues and achieve a rare kind of alchemic fusion, where the profound and the sublime are realised by the most absurd means.

However, let's not forget the influence of the Japanese noise/rock acts that emerged throughout the 90s. I was wondering when their effect would eventually be felt in the West, and I'd pretty much given up hope but here howls the ghosts of High Rise especially; that same manic sense of impetus, that same cranking of everything to breaking point and never ever letting up, not even for a second, in case it all slips away from them. Impetus is ALL here.

And dig those bonkers titles: 'Pussy Footin' the Duke', 'Death Squad' and, the stand-out track for me, 'The Antlers of the Midnight Sun', which starts out where The Stooges left off with 'L.A. Blues'! Intentions come no bolder than that, but the Comets follow through, walk the talk and unintentionally knock out a soundtrack to Bad Wisdom, the somewhat unreliable chronicle of the heroically foolhardy mission to save the world that Bill Drummond (Aka King Boy D of the KLF) & Mark Manning (AKA Zodiac Mindwarp) undertook in 1994, a mission that saw them hauling an artwork of Elvis wrapped in an AC/DC t-shirt to the North Pole, meeting everyone from Oscar Wilde to Keith Richards and Madonna along the way, and never quite making it in the end. A great book, and it deserved a sonic accompaniment, which the Comets have managed, and even though it only lasts less than five minutes it says ALL there is to say about ...err…blood rituals, frozen lakes, and the poetic desolation of the Arctic wastes.

Repeated listens, which this album demands at gunpoint, suggest a deep gumbo swamp-pit of influences have been dredged. Zappa, obviously, anything from *Hot Rats* to *Thing-Fish*, Amon Düül II (*Yeti*, obviously), Cream's *Disraeli Gears* (hard to trace under all those layers of hunky fuzz but I'm fucking positive it's in there somewhere), Pink Floyd – before Syd quit, Edgar Broughton Band (*Out, Demons, Out!*), The Stooges (they've been there since the start for the Comets, but in this album they seem to have initiated dark rites to summon the unique six-string stylings of our man Ron Asheton) and, if I may be so bold, Butthole Surfers, especially *Locust Abortion Technician*. On that album Gibby & co were at their absolute peak and everything they touched turned to festering toxic gold; well here on *Blue Cathedral* you sense that Miller and his cohorts have tapped into that same wellspring of demento-genius that requires the participants be absolutely in full control and completely off their tits, at the same time!

I can think of no-other rock bans that have so successfully captured the innocent raunch of sub-*Nuggets* garage rock, the numb fuzz of Cleveland proto-punk, the art-noise of New York and the full unwholesome potential of effects-drenched full-blown psychOdelia together on one album, and sometimes in the course of a single song!

Comets On Fire celebrate their vast range of influences without succumbing to them.

They have helped reinvigorated a previously stagnant rock scene by showing a heartfelt respect for the past whilst at the same time burning a hole through every sequentially-shelved back issue of *Mojo* on the planet.

And that's why their new album *Avatar* comes as something of a disappointment.

They're still the Comets but…where's the Fire? Somewhere between this and *Blue Cathedral*, a period of no more than two years, it seems all the numerous side-projects - Howlin' Rain, Six Organs of Admittance, Colossal Yes – have drained off some of the poison from their juicy wound and in getter 'better' they've lost some of the fever that made them burn.

What's most immediately noticeable is that you can now hear what Ethan Miller is singing. A good thing? Once attuned to the previously established COF approach, it becomes immediately obvious that the actual lyrics don't matter. The voice is so echoplexed and lost in the squall of howling feedback that it's reduced to the grunts and wails of some Pazuzu, forever trapped inside the body of a 13 year-old rock groupie sprawled on the back seat of Ian Gillan's limo.

Now though, there's actual words you can hear and perhaps a song with some kind of message, or meaning? Something to justify those song titles perhaps? Uh-oh, this isn't what was expected, not after everything that had gone before.

Noticeable also is the diminished state of emergency that made their other albums so thrilling. Previously they had been at Def-Con 1, night and day, for what seemed like years, but now…well, put it this way, no-one's checking the hand baggage for knives anymore. All told, Avatar is a good collection of songs that any modern rock band of moderate ambition would be pleased with, but this is the Comets for fuck's sake. These are the men who unleashed the truly demented and terrifying 'The Black Poodle' and now, well it's all a little bit Eagles for my liking.

Maybe they're just getting older, feeling the first tremors of an impending mid-life crisis? Maybe the two long years of touring to promote *Blue Cathedral* drained their reserves somewhat? Maybe they felt a certain obligation, as all bands do at some stage, to 'challenge preconceptions' and we can at least be thankful that they didn't 'do a Sting' and fuck off to the Amazon to play nose-flutes and paint their arses blue. They're still rocking, just not they way we'd like 'em to.

Some have noted more 'emotional complexity', and you can argue that's down to Ben Chasny whose own Six Organs of Admittance project serves to fill the dustier corners usually avoided by the Comets. Idiosyncratic lyrics and deceptively complex but restrained melodies set him apart from the more traditionally rock-rooted Miller, but when each man's tendencies are brought together, the results have been devastatingly potent. On this album, with the exception of the raucous 'Holy Teeth', restraint wins out, as the band take a break at *Hotel California* and *Take It Easy*. There's psych jams aplenty – 'Sour Smoke' and 'The Swallow's Eye' – but they just aren't unhinged enough, contain no sense of threat to the listener, while the ballad 'Lucifer's Memory', sounding like it fell off the lead-out groove from *Led Zep III*, is as mellow as the contents of Neil Young's bong circa 1973. Then again, this could serve as a 'gateway' album for those intrigued by what the Comets have to offer, but simply are not ready for the full

force of their earlier recordings.

Don't misunderstand me here. This is not a BAD album, not by any stretch of the imagination, it's just not what I expected. It just doesn't come tearing out of the gate like we've come to expect from these men, so let's call this their Sunday morning album, the one to kick back to, and then let's find the imp that used to dose their Corn Flakes with PCP and put him back on the case because, as the world lurches ever nearer to oblivion, we need the right men on hand to provide a fitting accompaniment, and no-one else – when they're really burning – are as up to the task as Comets On Fire.

RIK RAWLING 28/09/2006

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Lightning Bolt

Hypermagic Mountain

USA LOAD RECORDS LOAD078 CD (2005)

Lightning Bolt are two men – Brian Gibson: bass, Brian Chippendale: drums and vocals - who are part of the festering and fecund underground arts scene in Providence, Rhode Island, specifically the RISD (Rhode Island School of Design) out of which has sprang some of the more striking acts in the new American music scene, including Black Dice, Forcefield and LB themselves. Ostensibly cut off – both geographically and psychologically – from the US mainland, the environment they exist in is one of mutual support and encouragement, with band members moving back and forth between groups, sparking off their own side-projects, and gleefully indulging their others obsessions, be it film-making, theatre or, in the case of Chippendale, drawing and painting. Centred around the Fort Thunder work and living space, it seems from the evidence of this record, to be a gloriously inspired place and time to be in.

Now four albums in, and continuing to employ nothing more than their bass/drumkit and vast array of effects pedals, you would be forgiven for thinking that perhaps they might be starting to run out of ideas. Not so. Their last album, 2003's *Wonderful Rainbow*, was as intense an experience as you thought could be possible with such a minimal arsenal at their disposal, but the new collection goes much, much further than before. For a start off, it's heavier. The volume has been cranked up to needle-in-the-infra-red levels and right from the get-go the guys are playing with all the emotional intensity of potential suicides standing on the window-ledge, looking doooooooowwwn. The first recoiling riff bursts out of the speakers, the drums kick the door in and you're left with no option but to strap yourself in and experience the ride. 57 minutes later, you come out reeling, you're left numbed into submission, all senses pummelled, all sensations reduced to a flatline. But in a good way.

It's futility in itself to pick out individual tracks, as the whole thing needs to be experienced as one thunderous continuum of psychodelik wonder. A more 'metal' technique to the guitar-playing is evinced by a couple of tracks peaking out with Eddie Van Halen-style wee-ooh-waahs, which sound especially banshee-like when coming out of the same kind of instrument that Lemmy plays. Sure to inspire many a witless pirate who thinks this 'noise rock' lark is a piece of piss (witness Zorn's latest bandwagon-jumping effort – Moonchild, where, quelle surprise, bass and drums are loosed on the man's compositions, with obligatory Yamantaka Eye-esque squawks and grunts courtesy of Mike Patton), LB demonstrate the gulf between idea and actualisation. Are these even 'compositions' in the ordinary sense that you can expect to hear reconstructed live, or are they just making it up as they go along? Does it matter?

For anyone intrigued I would recommend this album as a starting point, though an even more startling introduction to the Bolt would be their DVD *The Power of Salad* which shows them playing live in several locations, using their trademark approach of simply setting up their kit on the floor of a venue (and occasionally outside a venue, if they feel there's too many people inside to cramp their style) and letting the crowd move in around them, though few dare get too close to the flailing arms of the drummer, who is shaking off sweat like a feral dog emerging from a drowning lake. And perhaps most telling of what Lightning Bolt are about is the audience themselves. A sound so deranged and uninhibited would, you might suppose, encourage hordes of slam-dancing sweat-punks to leap about like they were being shot at, but many of the crowd are simply stood still. One young gent, looking like he's walked in off the set of *The Tomorrow People*, simply stares off into space, seeing something that only he can see. Perhaps it's Cthulhu, spawn of the imagination of that other famous son of Providence, Howard Philips Lovecraft, summoned back from beyond the Starry Maw by the alien but strangely sympathetic emanations of Lightning Bolt? Who knows, perhaps in amongst Chippendale's incomprehensible vocal howls is hidden the dread invocation: 'Cthulhu Ftang!'

RIK RAWLING 28/11/2005

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Mogwai

Mr Beast

UK PIAS PIASX 062CD (2006)

What put all this fire in Mogwai's belly? The fire that many had thought they'd lost for good, especially after the funereal *EP* and severely restrained *Rock Action*.

I'd put it down to the likes of Lightning Bolt coming along and totally invigorating the rock scene, pointing the ways forward beyond the restrictive straits of Sonic Youth which have held so many back from sailing off into uncharted territory. Mogwai have always had their ear to the ground and must have become aware that these acts were coming along that could not be ignored, whereas they were very much in danger of becoming yesterday's men, even though they were all still in their 20s.

Whatever unctuous muse it was that held a blowtorch to their knackers, it matters not, as the results are what we care about. This is by far their best album to date, and one of the best rock albums of the decade and perhaps of all-time if we really want to get into Mojo-tastic '100 Best...' polls of irrelevancy. I'm just trying to put across how good I think this record is and how I believe that anyone into 'rock' should hear it and come to know it intimately.

Not that there's much deviation from the now-established Mogwai template – Barry Burns' piano-led pieces alternate between short neatly structured slow-burners and a couple of skull-smashers. The difference here is the decision to record in their own Glasgow studio 'The Castle of Doom'. In the past they've gone off to the USA for a month, within which they have to cram in a lot of work, which forces some inevitable compromises, most evident on their 2001 album *Rock Action*. On this occasion, they've had all the time in the world to hone the songs, to get them right, and it shows.

It starts strong with 'Auto Rock', which is ostensibly piano-led but features some incredible strident drumming that gradually comes to dominate the entire piece and sets the tone for what's to follow – easily one of the 'gwai's best songs: 'Glasgow Mega-Snake'. One of their few songs to blast out of the gate and sustain its pace to the end, it's got a killer riff and it alternates between 'heavy' and 'thunderous', cramming megatonnes of energy into little more than three minutes.

What follows from then on is an ebb and flow of carefully-crafted and executed 'art rock' that's never too controlled to allow for some surprises. Stand out tracks are the piano-driven 'Friend of the Night', calculatedly intense 'Folk Death '95' and ethereal 'I Chose Horses' (the title a nod to one of Stuart's favourite songs – 'I Break Horses' by Smog, which actually sounds like a Mogwai song itself) which features spoken lyrics in the native Japanese by Envy-member Tetsuya Fukagawa, making for what could have been an unexpectedly muted and poignant closer, but being a Mogwai album, you can always expect a Wagnerian finale and they deliver with 'We're No Here' which advances like a Panzer Tank through the once beatific countryside of the Ardennes, obliterating everything in its path. As one friend described it to me before I'd heard the track: 'It's rock, but not as we know it. Its riff is composed from duelling guitars, last heard to such great effect on Iron Maiden's 'Hallowed Be Thy Name', but it's much darker than the Boy's Own testosterockers could ever muster up, made more ominous by the lack of lyrics and the nonsensical but altogether sinister title.

Brilliant stuff, which makes me despair for those who claim to not 'get' the point or purpose of Mogwai. Here's 'Martyn', reviewing the album online: 'I still can't understand the fuss about this band - they sound so unremittingly cold and emotionless that I just don't see the point.' He then goes on to recommend other, decidedly-lesser, 'post-rock' bands as being better examples of the genre, which only confuses the issue further.

Others describe the album as 'lazy art' and even 'turgid'. Each to their own, but how can a band who've been so dedicated to their work over the past decade, who've never deviated from their chosen path, who've proven what it takes to sustain a creative vision amidst this Blipvert culture, be so casually dismissed? Mogwai have made the album of their careers, and set a new standard for a whole host of also-rans to emulate. Those indolent, inept copyists will have their 15 minutes and then shuffle off back to the day-jobs. The difference is that, quite simply, they don't mean what they say. Mogwai are, always have been, always will be, for real.

RIK RAWLING 12/09/2006

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Red Sparowes
At The Soundless Dawn
USA NEUROT RECORDINGS NR035 CD (2005)
Red Sparowes
Every Red Heart Shines Toward the Red Sun
USA NEUROT RECORDINGS NR045 CD (2006)

Mao's got a lot to answer for, least of all the Great Sparrow Campaign, initiated as part of the Great Leap Forward in China during the late 1950s. Think of it as a kind of aviary Year Zero as the indigenous sparrow population was systematically killed off in their tens of thousands in an attempt to preserve the farmland crops. Guess what the result of that 'Final Solution' was? The locust now had no predators, began to multiply at an exponential rate and then over the course of the next two years began to devour crops across the whole of China at a rate never previously experienced. A massive famine swept across the country and an estimated 30 million people.

This could explain the origin of this band's name, though it doesn't quite explain the curious spelling. Still intrigued, I consulted the Viz Profanisaurus and found no use of it as a euphemism for something deviant and menstrual, so the truth remains elusive, a secret shared between with the band members themselves.

Those band members are Isis guitarist Bryant Clifford Meyer, video director and Neurosis associate Josh Graham, Greg Burns of Temporary Residence and what I'm told are 'dark chamber folk sextet' Halifax Pier on bass and pedal steel, Andy Arahood from Angel Hair on bass/guitar and David Clifford from Pleasure Forever on drums. With the exception of Isis, has anyone on Earth ever heard of any of those other bands?

Thought not.

But you will have heard of the numerous bands they cite as influences – everyone from Sonic Youth to Death in June to the mighty Goblin – but it's got to be said that from the very first seconds of the first track onwards, across the breadth of both these albums, you will be reminded of one band and one band alone – the now deceased Godspeed You! Black Emperor. Many bands have attempted to emulate their example, with decidedly mixed results, but Red Sparowes seems to have understood how to absorb all of the bombast and grandeur and Wagnerian crescendos, and then send it back out even louder, even more intense, even more gratuitously EPIC.

There's plenty here though to put off those who think they've seen and heard it all before. The track titles (intended to be read as one continuous paragraph) could be interpreted as 'pretentious' and certainly make anything A Silver Mt Zion have put out look like a Low tracklisting, but they somehow justify such indulgences with the music and besides, what would you rather have, just track numbers?

And anyone locked into the daily fucking grind that this music aims to transcend could hardly fail to relate to the following (from the first album):

4. Mechanical sounds cascaded through the city walls and everyone revelled in their ignorance.

5. A brief moment of clarity broke through the deafening hum, but it was too late.

6. Our happiest days slowly began to turn into dust.

That pretty much sums up my dawn to dusk working life, and it's in my rare moments of private reflection that I turn to music like this to remind me that there is more to this mundane and soulless existence. Now, I like many forms of music and can appreciate a certain degree of subtlety and under-statement when the mood takes me but on most occasions what I need is something that launches me into the void, and that requires a big sound. A behemothic sound, one that's not just a relentless bludgeoning and painful to experience, but one that dares to try and fill the sky, perhaps like an enormous flock of birds suddenly started into flight, abandoning their perches within an abandoned building, the kind that squats black against the glowing horizon on each of these album covers. I need to feel that reach, the dare to take matters beyond gravity and the confines of flesh to a higher experiential state. Red Sparowes seems to feel that too, and clearly take what they do very, very seriously, because this is a serious matter. As we know, 99% of everything, including music, is shit, so when you come across something – as either listener or performer – that moves you, you really go at it and give everything you have to it. You are in the eye of the hurricane and there is no better place to be, no more heightened state of consciousness, than to be THERE, right at that moment. No amount or drugs or tantric sex or 'extreme' sports comes close to replicating that sense of both connection and removal from the Earth. That said, this music blessed-out hippy shit – from the outset there's a clear acknowledgment of the underlying constants of life: regret, grief, melancholy, madness – but these aren't regarded as hindrances but rather positive attributes, accelerators for action and, in the right hands, lenses for regarding the world from a different perspective to the one offered by the media conglomerates and the anal-retentive 'bloggers'.

Describing the music itself is almost irrelevant. If you know what 'post rock' means, if you've heard GY!BE and Explosions In The Sky and Mogwai at their most feral then you should know what to expect. No vocals, no lyrics. Guitars, guitars, guitars, some quiet moments between the rising and falling waves of sound, usually building to some overwhelming crescendo, with every needle in the red and the tornado rattling the shutters, until finally it's gone and an exhausted silence, the kind that even Samuel Beckett would have appreciated, is all that's left.

These albums are for you if you're inclined towards empty funfairs, gathering storm clouds and the darkness on the edge of town. These album are for you if you like windswept clifftops, the rumble of distant thunder and the sound of rain falling on an empty street at 1am. If you yearn for more shades of grey, more uncomfortable truths, more hunger in your heart; if you'd like to see the roads empty at rush-hour, the high-rise towers on fire, every discarded copy of Metro sucked up into the sky, every coffee shop window implode, every dosser in every doorway waking up one morning in a bed in Buckingham Palace as the Royal Family are exiled to Butlins in Minehead, then these albums are for you.

Enjoy.

RIK RAWLING 28/09/2006

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Pelican

The Fire In Our Throats Will Beckon The Thaw

USA HYDRAHEAD RECORDS HH666-91 CD (2005)

I'll start this review by way of a confession: I have, over the past few years, had the misfortune to witness numerous television programmes specifically designed for the early evening park-your-arse-with-a-glass-of-Chardonnay brigade. You know which ones I mean: *Gardens Mutation*, *Property Ulcer*, *Your Curtains Look Shit*. Made to a simple formula, they contribute nothing to the world but what's most striking about them is the need to fill every available second of 'dead time' (that is, when someone isn't speaking) with a musical soundtrack. Designed to appeal to (and made by) that uber alles 18-34 demographic, said soundtrack is made up of often-no-more-than five second snippets of tracks that anyone in that age bracket is supposed to like. This ranges from the intentionally bland Radio Two fare

to more 'challenging' acts like Boards of Canada and even Aphex Twin (but obviously not 'Come To Daddy'). Now being a long-time admirer of Mogwai's work, you can imagine my surprise and dismay when one of their tracks turned up on 'Gardener's World'. Should I be appalled, or is it really no big deal? When material such as this (admittedly Mogwai at their most genteel) can be assimilated into the mainstream culture, what next? Of course, since then, I've heard other instrumental rock acts like Sigur Ros and Explosions In The Sky used in a similar context, and simply shaken my head at the sorry state of affairs we've come to.

Anyway, I'm pleased to announce that there is NO chance that Pelican, unlike the aforementioned bands to whom they're most often compared, will ever end up soundbyted between David Holmes and Kate Melua on 'House Bandits' anytime soon. Because, quite simply, they are too heavy. They are too much. They are the place where all the clichés of 'post rock' fall down and die. No found sound samples. No musique concrète. Just riffs, ebbing and flowing like a heavy sea into which the hapless have been shipwrecked, or else cast themselves over the side for, just to experience something Beyond.

How to discuss this album without using the words: 'epic', 'majestic' or even 'awesome'. Im-fucking-possible, I'm afraid. The album cover is a grainy long-shot of a cloud-filled sky, and their previous releases all feature that same sense of atmospheric space, a void that the band feel compelled to fill with their sound. And what a sound. Originally entitled *Black Doom on Tuesday*, this is a collection of songs that transcends like the sum of its influences, and it's really such a wide range of influences – from 70s cock rock to emocore, from free jazz to thrash – that it really doesn't resemble any of the source material. There are shades of Slint in there – the chopped-up riffs, the sudden swathes of space – whilst the lighter melodies used to counterpoint the thunder are reminiscent of Steve Reich, but the two reference points the band themselves cite are Earth and Godflesh. That may have been more obvious on their earlier releases, which are far heavier and doom-laden, but with this album they have clearly matured and recognised the need to allow some shades of light. There's also an added level of complexity to the structures, more intricate than is apparent on first listening, which can be attributed to their development as musicians and the extra time allowed in the recording studio for these sessions, where ideas could be explored further without budgetary constraints. This progression allows them to explode the boundaries of whatever restrictions a 'metal' tag might place upon them, but to many they remain a 'poor man's Isis' which is somewhat unfair. There are similarities but there are enough differences to prove that Pelican are clearly ploughing their own furrow.

The album has seven tracks, with most songs coming in at over ten minutes, except for the untitled track four which stands out from the rest as being an acoustic arrangement and still manages to 'rock' harder than most as they seem to be strumming with their knuckles raking against the strings. But it takes more than the 'gimmick' of a new instrument (recall Mogwai chucking in a banjo on 'Rock Action') to justify yourselves. Whereas other instrumental-rock acts were quickly dismissed for relying on a perceived quiet/loud/quiet/loud formula, Pelican seem to be starting

from an entirely different point, as if those bands simply never existed. The build on repeated progressions, use natural peaks and troughs in the flow, and seem intent on making each song stand alone as some mutant strain of sonic poetry, an aural haiku, though it's the kind that celebrates the vast frozen wastes of the North or the unforgiving vault of sky that hangs above as you stand in an empty car park at midnight. They don't need a singer. Lyrics would be utterly superfluous, especially on a song like 'Last Day of Winter' which is so good, so indefinably emotive, that it transcends all forms of language and simply hangs there, shimmering and incandescent.

It would be easy to froth hyperbolic about this record, this band. Suffice to say that this is one of the best records I've ever heard and I recommend it enthusiastically.

RIK RAWLING 28/11/2005

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Howlin Rain

Howlin Rain

USA BIRDMAN RECORDS BMR090 CD (2006)

The collective energy behind the psychodelik powerhouse that is Comets On Fire, along with its numerous affiliates, is enough to power the entire Eastern seaboard of the USA for a year. Along with COF, Ethan Miller has now teamed up with John Moloney from the knowingly-unhinged Sunburned Hand of Man to concoct a 'supergroup' stew, of sorts. That very term, forever associated with the supposed sonic travesties of Blind Faith, Asia and Velvet Revolver – amongst many others – is not relevant here. This is no 'event' warranting chain-store display bins and unavoidable advertising campaigns. This is (probably) a one-off album, conceived by like minds who want to continue challenging and surprising themselves in terms of what they do and what they have to say.

For starters, it's a good name for a band, or an album for that matter. Evocative.

It suggests plenty of what's to follow, but it pales into insignificance alongside the incredible track titles: 'Calling Lightning With A Scythe', 'Roll On The Rusted Days', 'Firing of the Midnight Rain' and, top o' the heap, 'Death Prayer In Heaven's Orchard' – which should have been the title of either Bukowski's or Burroughs' last books.

The band was conceived after COF had completed their magnum opus *Blue Cathedral* which Miller felt had taken all the ideas they'd first conceived on *Field Recordings From The Sun* to their absolute limit and a radical step was required to recharge the creative batteries, to keep things interesting, to 'dare.' They wanted, in Miller's words to be 'hurtful' to the rock music they'd already made, and when it's material as uncompromising and psychotic as COF's, then the only option is to go completely in the other direction. In their case, this meant back to the centre, to the heart of things, to rediscover old and now deeply-unfashionable influences, and filter them through their own particular sieve of neuroses and obsessions. And to have some fun. The intention from the outset was to be as 'populist' as their muses would allow, creating something 'your awesome rocker uncle would dig.' Despite the urgency of the rehearsals and the relatively short time this project took from concept to realisation, there was always a solid understanding of what was wanted. Miller: 'I wanted to make sure it sounded like the pop songs were lying in the mud, and flying around the river with the logs and debris and shit.'

And it does. The music has clearly been inspired by an overdose of Creedence and *American Beauty*-era Grateful Dead, both of which are no longer the unmentionable influences they might once have been in the eyes of the Alternative Thought Police, but it is not some dreadful 'retro' homage (Kings Of Leon, for example – back to the day-jobs, you cunts), it is a sincere and honest and in some ways sounds like the album they've always wanted to make once they got their 'avant-garde white noise' indulgences out of their systems.

They are clearly having fun here, hearkening back to the 'country rock' of their dim and distant youths, taking full advantage of the roads opened up by the likes of Will Oldham and Billy Callaghan, who have been unashamedly and honestly championing the potential of this music for many years now (albeit with mixed results in the case of the inconsistent Oldham), implicitly determined to stomp into the dust the depressing legacy of The Eagles and all that *Hotel California* shit. Other reference points suggested throughout the whole album – which is somewhat straighter than you might expect from men with such deranged pedigrees – are Steely Dan (Burroughs, again – strange how his presence hovers around the fringes of this album for me, must be the Kansas-retreat aspect of his later life), Lynyrd Skynyrd and even the more boogied-up Bon Scott-era AC/DC. But, of course, things get stranger, heavier and altogether darker, especially on the longer songs where what would have been in the hands of lesser man some room for contemplative 'space', now we get feedback, reverb, skronk, dirt, dust, thunder, ozone, cold sweat, hot blood and fires burning in the mountains. Or, as Ethan Miller himself says: 'We put Howlin' Rain together with the intention of making a good old fashioned free-wheeling rock album with a bared soul and a body in which Joy, hysteria and Darkness all lie upon the same rambling bones. We make music to beat the steering wheel of your van to or sing along with while drinking whiskey in the bathtub on a Saturday night with your dog.'

Being in possession of neither a dog, a bathtub or a van, I content myself to sit back in my chair and become willingly lost in a landscape of the heart and mind that broods somewhere between the prose of Cormac McCarthy (*Outer Dark* as opposed to *Blood Meridian*), Harry Crews and Jim Dodge. What impresses me most about these men and their efforts, apart from the music, is that certainly in the case of Miller, there's a day job to be done. This incredible burst of creative energy is being achieved on top of the daily fucking grind, and is probably all the better for it. It gives them an urgency, a need to DO IT and to DO IT NOW before it's too late, before the collective burden of age, regret, despair and disappointment takes its inevitable toll.

One of the main surprises from this album (and for COF fans there are plenty) is that Ethan Miller can really sing. Up to now, his vocal delivery has been swamped in Echoplex, shredded in the hurricane of the Comets' blitzkrieg assault, but here you can actually hear his ragged howl-at-the-moon gravel throated lyrics, and what incredible lyrics they are: 'You brother once had love in hand/now you show only teeth and eyes/you walk the desert half-wolf, half-god/kicking at the skulls of husbands and daughters.' Dark poetry at its finest, somewhere between the most inspired lobe-bleeds of Burroughs (again) and Ian Astbury (no, seriously). The words to these songs could be cut-ups from any number of 'cult' novels, where drunks and lunatics are lost in the 'desert'- be it the genuine Arizona badlands or Camus' city wastelands – and work in much the same way, gradually collaging a dark but enticing tapestry in which all the clues to our bloody past, confused present and doomed future are woven.

This record is a plea for madness in a world that is dangerously sane. It's the wind that knows why you lay awake at night. It's the dirt from the heel of Hemingway's boot. It's the real deal, an unpolished diamond amidst a seam of crusty shit. It's music for people who haven't given up yet, who know clocks are lying and that the sun never really rises, that we just keep falling slowly, inexorably towards the end of the night.

Enjoy.

RIK RAWLING 31/08/2006

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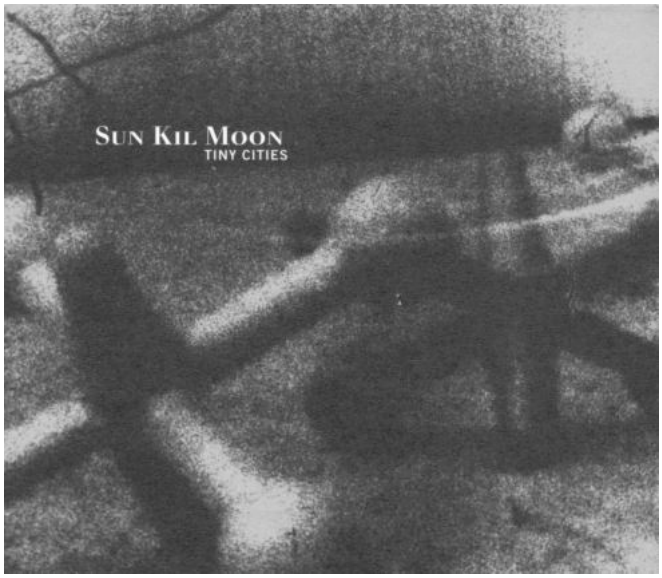

Sun Kil Moon

Tiny Cities

UK ROUGH TRADE RTRADCD 287 CD (2005)

Your appreciation of this record depends on one simple fact: whether or not you know of, and give a shit about, a band called Modest Mouse. For myself, I had never heard them and only seen them in catalogue listings, amongst the hundreds and hundreds of other insignificant American indie bands, who have been proliferating like spores in a petri dish since before Nirvana first coughed up a chunk. So when rumours emerged that the new Sun Kil Moon album would be a set of cover versions of Modest Mouse songs, I was puzzled to say the least. Mark Kozelek, lead member of SKM, had a long history of oddball cover versions – from his days in Red House Painters giving the likes of Kiss and Simon & Garfunkel his own particular treatment, to his astonishing set of AC/DC cover versions, where he mined nuggets of regret and longing from the imposing cock-rock of Bon Scott & co – but this seems his most defiantly idiosyncratic move yet. After the triumph of SKM's first album *Ghost of the Great Highway*, why resort to a tactic usually reserved for an act on the comeback trail? What was the man thinking?

We needn't have worried. The Koz takes 11 MM songs and trims away virtually every aspect of the original, including some portions of lyric, and reconstructs the remnants into a suite of songs that celebrate melancholy, faded hope, Autumn skies and the ache of having lived at all. This may be sacrilege to anyone who thinks MM were any good, and there are some who seem to regard the singer and lyricist as someone especially gifted, but the fact that Kozelek has changed the source material so comprehensively means that there is no point in comparing like for like because there is no comparison. This isn't some kind of sad obscuro-indie karaoke, this is just great art.

'Trucker's Atlas' recalls the, for me, the yearning and weary but unbeaten optimism of 'Wichita Lineman', while by far the stand-out track is 'Ocean Breathes Salty'. The original is all over the shop – a kind of mutant funk-indie hybrid that recalls some of the odd material emerging after post-punk, like ABC's 'Beauty Stab' for example - whereas The Koz reduces it all down to a death-bed-side lament. 'Your body may be gone I'm gonna carry you, in my head in my heart and my soul, any maybe we'll get lucky and we'll both live again, I don't know, I don't know, I don't think so.'

There's a real sense that this song is the one he really wanted to do, recording the rest as a justification, and he really pours his scarred ashtray heart into it, finding a wounded resonance in the words that are enhanced by the barely-there guitar chords that seem to whisper respectfully in the background. 'You wasted life, why wouldn't you waste death?' he asks, a question that I suppose we all have to face at some time in our lives. The Koz's voice is one of the most significant and poignant in modern music and it seems he can reduce almost any source material into something that conforms to his particular sad and mournful but still somehow positive world-view.

That takes a particular brand of genius and it's long overdue that the man gets the recognition he deserves. This won't be the album to do it though, and given the awkward methodology of the man you have to wonder if he ever will 'make it' in the popular sense, though I'm sure he could care less about all that shit. He's found his level, doing what he wants to do, when he wants to do it – a position to be envied.

RIK RAWLING 01/09/2006

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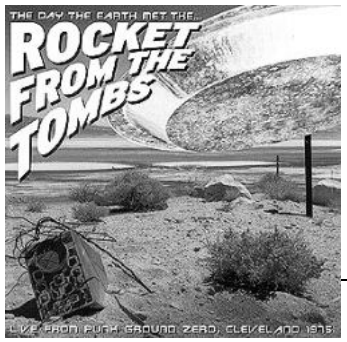

Rocket From The Tombs

The Day The Earth Met...

GERMANY GLITTERHOUSE RECORDS GRCD 549 CD (2002)

My expectations for this album were raised when 'Ain't It Fun?' was included in Rough Trade's *Rock N Roll vol.1* compilation from 2003. In amongst all the other sludge and fuzz, this grim delight really stood out from the pack. Something about the flayed delivery of the guitar and the stoned groans of the singer suggested that these men were not affecting any kind of pose, they really did mean what they were saying. And what a message to have for humanity: 'Ain't it fun when you tell her that she's just a cunt?' The sleaziest kind of bad attitude possible, and yet you sense that they know it's not big or clever but simply do not give a shit either way. They are playing for a reason that they can't define, and it's amidst that ignorance and confusion that they managed to stumble into regions previously unexplored by any band.

RFTT were legend long before this record was ever released, and in some way its very existence may now ruin that cherished notion of the last great lost band. But before we discuss the contents, a little history first:

Late 1974, Cleveland, USA, once a thriving industrial heartland, now crumbling as OPEC squeeze the balls of the US motor industry dry. One David Thomas, AKA 'Crocus Behemoth' does a passable Lester Bangs pastiche for local music rag The Scene, and pretends to be in a band, essentially a media-prank called The Great Bow-Wah (Death) Band. The scene is in disarray...stadium rock is in the ascendant, the hippies failed, and bands like The Stooges and The Velvet Underground are used by many excluded from the mainstream (for reasons of taste, physical deformity, mental damage) as touchstones, the only music worth listening to when everything else sucks, man. Taking their name from a high school film project inspired by Zappa, RFTT start out as just something to do of a Saturday night, pulling together the remnants of the prank band and playing a debut gig in June '74 that consisted of virtually the entire Kick Out The Jams album by The MC5. Once Peter Laughner arrives on the scene, things go up a gear. He joins the band by simply asking Thomas if he could. The man has ambition, and is in thrall to his heroes Iggy and Lou, to the extent of following them through the same self-destructive wall of flame that will consume him within two years. Laughner plays a mean guitar, sings and writes his own material. They need it. Their only original songs are leftover scraps of nonsense from the Bow-Wah days, but bassist Craig Bell brought the raw tunes for songs that once fused with Laughner and Thomas' lyrics become some of their most successful songs. At the 'Special Extermination Night' of 22 Dec '74, they support fellow Cleveland freaks The Electric Eels and include in their set a terrifying first unveiling of the soon-to-be-classic '30 Seconds Over Tokyo'.

Gigs are hard to come by though, with the local scene dominated by covers bands. Laughner uses his contacts to get them a slot on local radio station WMMS, for which they tape a session of 12 tracks. They record it live reel-to-reel in a loft on West 4th Street, in a 200 x 50 foot space that they set about filling with some of the most startling rock music ever recorded. Of the session Laughner says at the time: 'It's not studio stuff, but it's a valid statement about what we were doing one night at our loft, just going crazy.' He's not kidding. The WMMS broadcast gives them big exposure. Laughner uses his loose friendship with then-editor of Creem Lester Bangs to give them a boost. The band plays more gigs, get tighter and more focused, putting on ever more wilder shows with the imposing Thomas appearing on stage in a cape and heaving tsunami's of sweat out across the front rows. But just as they seem to be in the ascendant to

bigger things, it all starts to fall apart. In July '05, they debut new songs 'Amphetamine' and 'Sonic Reducer', but two band members off their tits on acid meant the gig is a shambles and afterwards there are recriminations and verbal assaults. It's the beginning of the end.

They played their last show in August of that year, and then just seemed to fizzle away to nothing. Various members went off to start their own bands whilst Laughner descended into a maelstrom of drugs and booze. Lester Bangs documented his end in a poignant and heartfelt essay (featured in *Psychotic Reactions & Carburettor Dung*) which resonates still today as a warning to anyone who wants their dream too much. You can't help but wonder what a surviving Laughner would make of this retrospective of his band's brief but cherished moment.

Well, I can at least tell you what I made of it. I loved it. I laughed out loud and thumped my fists on my thighs with glee when I heard the first burst of their inspired take on 'Raw Power', which kick starts this album. If they are in reverence to their heroes, it doesn't sound like it – as they pummel the familiar riff with a charge of mastodon riffing, over which a howling, glass-shattering guitar plays the one-finger piano line. After about 30 seconds you realise that this is just going to go on and on and on and nobody is going to start singing 'Dance to the beat of the living dead...' because nobody needs to. This IS the beat of the living dead, wrenched up out of the grave and loose in the streets of a haunted America. The tone is set for what's to follow – nine tracks from the Feb '75 sessions, plus recordings from two live shows later that same year, the last in August shortly before they imploded. Precursors of their chosen take on the rock n roll idiom can be found with VU's 'I Heard Her Call My Name' – that same reckless rush, that same knowingly-shambolic delivery, Iggy and The Stooges 'Death Trip' – everything trebled off the end of the scale, bass grunting like a fat old bloke having sex with a teenage girl who's just found his stroke, perhaps for the last time - but more often than not it's in records that came years after the band's demise – Buzzcocks 'Spiral Scratch', PIL's entire first album – that suggest that even if those bands had never heard of RFTT, the Cleveland freaks had discovered something that HAD to happen, that had to leak out into the world of man.

Other stand out tracks include a hilarious reductus rex version of The Rolling Stones 'Satisfaction', that lasts about ten seconds but is still the best take on that old cliché that I've ever heard. The makers of Snickers bars once used the song as a soundtrack for an advert featuring some groomed ponce at an indoor windsurfing race (!?!) who suddenly gets a bit peckish, nips off to the concession stand and thus gets his 'satisfaction' (these marketing men, geniuses eh?). How much more of an enticement might that commercial have been had they used the RFTT version? We'll never know.

Their original songs – 'Amphetamine', 'Seventeen', 'Life Stinks' (can't get any dumber than The Ramones? How about 'Life stinks. I need a drink.'?) are all twisted almost beyond recognition from the original New York Dolls template. Lyrically, they seem to be dealing with the same subject overarching theme – that modern urban life for people is shit, and they'll resort to anything: drugs, booze, bad sex, for a distraction – but Thomas and Laughner, the main songwriters, always seemed aware of the clichés and would neatly sidestep them at every opportunity.

The word 'nihilism' often gets used when discussing RFTT. I don't see the connection. The themes of their songs suggest they weren't all that happy and didn't really care but the fact that they felt compelled to even talk about it means they weren't that far gone. Nihilism is an idea jaded rockers have often toyed with (Bowie, with Iggy on the Dinah Shore Show from the mid-70s, once tried to explain – through a blizzard of cocaine – why Iggy appealed to him. Bowie said that it was Nihilism, 'and I LOVE nihilism.' Shortly after he was back in Berlin, which is as good a place as you could hope for when tapping into that vibe) but they also like to go off to the Amazon rainforest and makes albums playing nose-flutes, before quickly acknowledging their folly, so we can't ever really take these creatures at their word.

I think RFTT, particularly Laughner did care, perhaps too much. There was certainly plenty of cynicism in these songs, but beneath every cynic is a romantic, and usually a wounded one, and that jaded worldview is nothing more than a bullet-proof scab behind which they can hide from a world that they can't understand. A world they want to interact with but feel repelled by. Every surly shop assistant, every barbed put-down from the boss, every letter from the bank, is another arrow in their hides, until they just can't take it anymore. Some take the easy option and sink into depression or madness. Others use booze or pills to numb their senses. And some lash out with their bodies, physically assaulting their immediate environment, or their minds – through art. Laughner did everything he could to keep the world at bay, but it wasn't enough. The bastards got him in the end.

RFTT were all about the energy of the moment, which is why they could only sustain it for as briefly as they did before collapsing in on themselves. Various members split off into other bands – Stiv Bator to The Dead Boys, and most significantly David Thomas who, with Pere Ubu, went on to achieve everything that was beyond RFTT before they even got started. PU's original sound is not that far removed from RFTT and Thomas owes a debt to Laughner for giving focus to his vague notions, and providing a sense of impetus. Ultimately, it's better that RFTT didn't get any further than they did, otherwise we'd have never got those great late 70s Pere Ubu albums and this unique document wouldn't hold as much significance and appeal as it does.

Before 'punk' there was an energy out there, one that still lingers today, even in the age of mp3 downloads and the total absorption into the mainstream of the last vestiges of 'alternative' culture, an energy that is occasionally harnessed by a talented few who have no choice – they simply have to do it. It's just a shame Peter Laughner isn't around to witness it.

RIK RAWLING 02/12/2005

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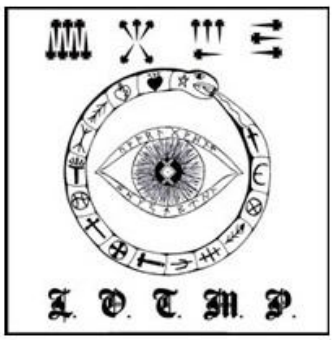
NEW BLASTS of FOULNESS

Additional Black Metal Monstrosities

Reviewed by JOHN BAGNALL



WOLD

L.O.T.M.P.

CANADA PROFOUND LORE PFl 09-05 CD (2004)

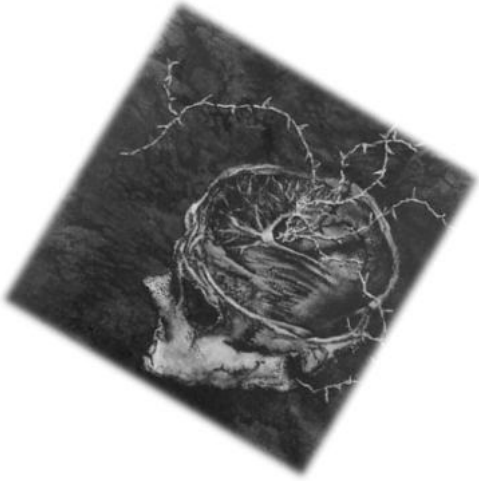
If the lonely world of outsider black metal ever attracts future critical appraisal then I hope this deranged little item doesn't get overlooked. WOLD's *L.O.T.M.P* merits praise as a highly original blast of extreme metal which only pays a passing resemblance to the generic BM sound. Dwelling in the barren Canadian prairies of Saskatchewan, WOLD's enigmatic members Fortress Crookedjaw (rhetoric, vocals, devices), Operation X (marching collisions, stringed cleansing, choral exhaltations) and Obey (scourge) have begotten here thirteen pieces of freakish sonic ritual. And *L.O.T.M.P's* tracks do sound ritualistic, not just mere slices of diverting noise. What the harsh buzzing guitar textures, warbly keyboard loops, over-driven drum-machines and unintelligible, bile-filled vocals are summoning up I shudder to think, but we're certainly beyond the safe realm of spotty adolescent Satanic dabbling.

The first four pieces, all invocations to the four elements, appear to be the groundwork of WOLD's occult spell, the heaviest and most agitated cuts on the disc, struggling to shake off the gravity-bound physical realm. By the middle of the CD some infernal form of transcendence has been achieved, 'Tending Thy Grounds' and 'Be It On Be It Within' both feature creepy and ethereal keyboard melodies which wash over grinding guitar mutilations and suggest ascension to an (inverted) heavenly state. By the time the intrepid listener comes to 'Children Of The Proud Fields' even more perilous and nightmarish nether regions have been reached, its scratchy militaristic drum rolls pummel the ears for nine scary minutes, while a swirling, sickening keyboard chorale repeats itself like a degraded piece of film stuck in its rusted projector. 'Weeping Goddess' proves to be no soft parting coda either – its drum track is an unremitting and savagely administered lash of the whip, the keyboards super-distorted cut-ups of Wagnerian motifs over which our man Fortress Crookedjaw spits scorn on all petty values and weak human sentiment.

Listening to this arcane record in one sitting can be a gruelling, oppressive and disturbing experience. At the time of writing a new blast of foulness is said to be imminent from WOLD. The question is how many of us are man enough to handle it?

JOHN BAGNALL

http://wold.cjb.net



Nachtmystium

Instinct:Decay

USA BATTLE KOMMAND BKRO9 CD (2006)

There are tons of rabid black metal fans who clog up web message boards with their views on what constitutes "true" and "kult" BM. This usually means adherence to the original Burzum-ic model, i.e. band members ought preferably to be Nordic, maybe with a taste for recreational church burning and the wearing of spooky corpse paint. A spot of romping around wintry forests at night might also be useful. Like jazz aficionados who won't listen beyond Charlie Parker, these defensive metallers would prefer it to be forever 1993. Yet in some ways this is one of the attractions of the scene. Its elite clannishness and strict definition of "our music" down to details like unreadable band logos and predominantly black record sleeves all contribute to the pleasurable feeling of belonging to an exclusive underground coterie.

I like plenty of those generic old school BM records, but being a Johnny-Come-Lately enthusiast can never claim to be a BM purist. Besides, most of the extreme metal records I've been excited about in the last year have been ones that have expanded definition of the genre or have even deliberately flouted the "rules". Which loosely brings us to the black metal scene in the USA. Possibly because the music has such a European origin and pedigree North American artists haven't felt the compulsion to stick to the original strictly buzzing black template. In recent years crucial, genre-defying records have spewed forth from USBM hordes like Weakling, Krieg, Velvet Cacoon, Lurker of Chalice, Leviathan and Xasthur.

Chicago's Nachtmystium have close connections with some of these American masters of the black metal arts. Their frontman Azentrius is also a member of USBM supergroup Twilight (see Jennifer's review) and it was chancing upon a You Tube video of Xasthur's Malefic performing live guest vocals with Nachtmystium that incited me to investigate their records. That web video was certainly compelling. Filmed in some dank, mice-infested West Coast club Malefic cast a riveting presence with black tendrils of hair obscuring a grim corpse-painted face, horrifying howls issuing from his raw throat. The Nachtmystium boys also looked pretty heavy duty and malevolent, lank tresses reaching their poor pummelled instruments as they bashed out a head-splitting funeral paced buzz.

Instinct:Decay has been praised for its incorporation of ambient and even psychedelic elements into the BM vocabulary, and its true they are here, but I have to confess I was a little disappointed. Ironically, the widened musical scope of the CD hinders the creation of an identifiable Nachtmystium sound. Most of the tracks rage in varying tempos to satisfying effect, though the vocals are maybe too low in the mix for full eardrum ripping impact. Acoustic interludes appear in some of the tracks as do psych-like guitar lines but these only lighten the mood which just isn't black enough. The shudder of recognition when you hear the scary, depressive noise of a Xasthur record is absent here, maybe the best BM records are made by one man misanthropes pursuing their monomanic visions and producing truly evil results. *Instinct:Decay* could be a cross-over record into general metal territory but I would have preferred to have been overpowered rather than mildly entertained.

JOHN BAGNALL

Vacuum Era Gelid Atmosphere (V.E.G.A.)

Cocaine

ITALY DEBEMUR MORTI DMP 008 CD (2006)

"The band was born at the last breaths of black metal and died soon after. This album is a gift to its memory…a dead born child…a trip went wrong…a nightmare in your brain." So run the sleeve-notes to this mysterious Italian masterpiece.

Apparently years in the making, *Cocaine* is a super-intense, highly layered studio creation (up to 8 guitars at times) which can't be described as raw or primitive, because its hefty power emerges from a carefully considered building of processed sounds. Blast beat drumming occurs at impossible non-human speeds, multi-layers of

guitars sound like angry mutant bees, gloomy synths repeat coffin nail riffs and vocals range from screeching to slow debauched drawls. And the most exciting thing about V.E.G.A's extreme sound palette is that it constantly goes off into totally unpredictable directions.

Take the first cut, "Lilja", during its two and a half minutes horror movie samples of a screaming girl run alongside a ridiculously convoluted guitar arpeggio which abruptly stops, leaving just the shrieking. This in turn fades into a field recording of a children's church choir singing a Catholic devotional hymn backed by a wavering and cheap sounding electric organ. Absolutely nuts but totally compelling! "Beton 1" begins with a few slow phased guitar chords before exploding into a two minutes of the fastest blastbeat attack possible. This suddenly disappears, there is digital crackle and then a doom laden riff starts, punctuated by a clanging anvil drum machine and menacing, drawling vocals. The sound of heavy gas-mask breathing enters as the doom riff fades.

Nightmare anti-logic continues throughout this amazing CD, reaching a confounding conclusion with the fourteen minute "Vacuum Era Gelid Atmosphere". This neo-prog BM monolith begins with a leaden, repetitive synth motif, radio static crackles like a bonfire, the listener is fooled into thinking this will be the general form of the piece. Two minutes of silence leaves the listener in an abyss, not knowing that a whispered incantation about Jesus Christ will eventually appear before finally evolving into a weirdly 80s style synth, and drum machine workout which sounds like Man Machine period Kraftwerk if they'd been Italian religious obsessives.

I unreservedly commend this baffling, surprising and extremely powerful record, yet another example of why underground black metal is currently such an innovative and exciting area of contemporary music.

JOHN BAGNALL

Emit / Vrolok

The Divine Eye / Pestilence 1440 Split CD

UK/USA GOATOWAREX SDL 017 CD (2005)

This is the stuff! Grim, trebly, home-made primitive avant-metal noise retched forth by morbid, introverted youths directly into their bedroom 4-Track machines. Satanic imagery is the metaphor through which these misanthropes channel their isolation from the Alpha Male world of conformity and compromise.

Emit is a name I knew, being the Somerset based BM deconstructor responsible for the celebrated *A Sword of Death for The Prince* released by Total Holocaust in 2005. The other damaged partner of this split CD was more of an unknown. A quick Google search revealed Vrolok is a US black noise loner who has released a handful of his hateful creations on obscure BM labels like Drakkar and Alpha Draconis.

Vrolok's contributions are marginally the more conventional of the pair and veer from fast and clattery drum, bass and guitar blasts like "Inverse

Devotion" and "Hellchoir" to something altogether quite strange. The former Graveland style dins are enjoyable enough but "Black Chemical Waltz" stands out for being solely composed of massively reverbed drumming and spoken word samples while "Heresy Divine" pulls off Gregorian Chant tapes played backwards and hellish burning wood noises without sounding clichéd or overtly Goth-like.

Our boy Emit wins the (dark) day with his eight perplexing contributions. The descent into the inner mania that is his music begins with "The Desolate Song of Sekhmet", a wordless vocal drone like the sad moans of the homeless souls wandering Purgatory. A distant synth buzz backs the next vocal piece, "Infinite Lucidity", this one more of an ancient religious invocation. Almost conventional electric instruments appear from then on, but in Emit's hands are subject to bizarre changes of pace, lashings of reverb, disturbing howls of demonic laughter and tumbling, rattling avoidance of structure. Has Emit invented a micro genre of free metal? "Manifesting Through Me" is the sound of Emit falling into a trance while the spirits which possess him take over the controls of his 4 Track. Fans of Abruptum and Rehtaf Ruo are sure to love this blood-curdling piece of pure malevolence.

JOHN BAGNALL

Clandestine Blaze

Church Of Atrocity

FINLAND NORTHERN HERITAGE NH-050 CD (2006)

Church Of Atrocity doesn't differ terribly from the preceding Clandestine Blaze CD *Deliverers of Faith* and that is certainly a good thing. *Deliverers* was a cold, cruel hunk of harsh black metal which was guaranteed to not only wipe the smile off your face but erase any trace of joy and hope in your life. The grim black & white photo-collage of its sleeve pictured a vintage church interior, the robed clerics on the altar bearing the faces of notorious European murderers. Quite how this "bad" imagery managed to have a chilling effect on me is still a mystery, normally I regard such stuff as tired as the dangly body piercing of a middle-aged Whitehouse fan. Similarly, the unrelenting anti-Christian subject matter of Clandestine Blaze records carries a dogged conviction which somehow packs a punch.

The most important factor which elevates Clandestine Blaze from the BM herd is the total dedication to a primitive and near minimalist sound. Mikko A's one man recording guise commits itself to murky, mid-paced guitar buzzing with gravelly growls for vocals and cheap, rattling drumming. Songs are generally lengthy, pounding the listener into submission and frills and progression are steadfastly avoided, except for the odd sample of moaning or weeping.

Church of Atrocity is a depressive delight throughout, though a favourite I keep returning to is the eleven minute misery fest that is "Ashes of the Eternal Wanderer". Hateful growling vocals echo mournfully over snail paced grating chords. The middle section abandons drums altogether and features tortuous feedback-scorched grinding which feels unending. The suicidal mood is so oppressive you'd swear Burzum's *Filosofem* is a cheery feel-good disc in comparison!

Earlier copies of this CD include a bonus disc wherein you get two six minute chunks of even more regressive primitivism. Whether these are demos I can't tell but it sounds like Mikko A has gladly submitted to surgery which has reduced his brain power to Cro Magnon level. "Nation of God" and "Altar of Perversion" are primeval grunts of astounding brutish strength and heaviness, possibly recorded just after he had clubbed to death a foolish innocent who dared to approach his remote territory in the frozen Finnish wastelands.

JOHN BAGNALL

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Deadverse Massive
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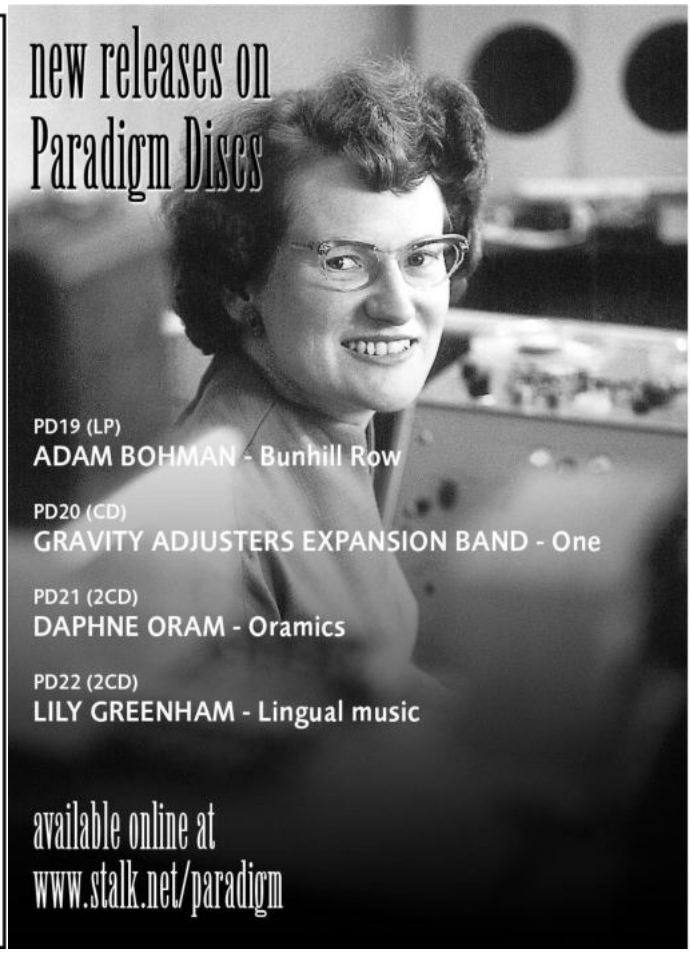

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Russ Waterhouse

and the very elastic sound of The SB

THE SOUND PROJECTOR FIRST HEARD THE MUSIC OF The SB on a split CD with Sapat, sent to the magazine by our good friends at the independent radio station in NYC, Free 103 Point 9. Then Russ Waterhouse, member of The SB, sent me a copy of their limited LP on his White Tapes label, which had been active since December 1998. He told me he'd been sporadically involved with Free103.9 for years. "The SB has played a few of their events," he indicated, "including 2004's Tune In at The Kitchen, and I curated a number of "noise"shows at their space in Brooklyn. Please know that the LP is only limited because 125 is about as many as I thought I could sell, based on previous sales of The SB releases. It turns out that I probably could have pressed a few more." In June 2006, we were able to meet up while I was in NYC attending a weekend comics event at MOCCA. Russ and his partner Lea Cho kindly took me for a slice of hot pizza in Brooklyn, followed by a night of noise on a boat. That's right – noise on a boat. The Empty Vessel is a disused canal barge moored in a basin near some remote part of Brooklyn, purchased by some enterprising youngsters for the princely sum of one dollar, and used as a performance / arts space. (See www.emptyvesselproject.org). Once safely on board this floating squat, we threw money into a kitty to help fund the bands (one of which had driven up from Pittsburgh), enjoyed a cold Budweiser and had our lugs assaulted by the sonic delights of Flitter Mice of Yore, Carbon, and M.O.T.H. The evening was rounded off by a couple of glasses of Maker's Mark in a late-nite bar where all the walls were painted black. Next day I met Russ downtown in The Strand bookstore, we retreated to a quiet diner where I enjoyed a hot pastrami sandwich with pickles. And here is what he said.

EP How many people are in The SB?

RW Currently seven. There are six active members, perhaps, but there's one other who plays occasionally. We maxed out at nine members at one point, but those other two lost interest. Some of our friends have played shows with us in a guest capacity, for instance, Aaron Rosenblum of Son of Earth and Sapat, his brother Harry Rosenblum, and Joel St. Germain of Humectant Interruption and Spite. Lea [Cho] has played in The SB a few times.

I knew one person in the group when I joined, my friend Adam [Burr] from high school. I was in a similar improvising trio previous to joining The SB, but that had fallen apart, so Adam suggested I come down to see what they were all about. There was this one member who played keyboard who quit, maybe three months after I started, and apparently it was because I was too loud!

The instrumentation has changed over time. There used to be drums on occasion, but that gave us more of a space-rock feel. I think we've come into our own sound gradually, although there's a certain gauzy atmosphere that dominates all of The SB's recordings. We've been more consistent over these past couple of years. It's more synthesiser-heavy now.

THE SOUND PROJECTOR MEETS **RUSS WATERHOUSE**, BROOKLYN ELECTRONIC MUSICIAN, MEMBER OF **THE SB**, **WATERSPORTS** AND **BLUES CONTROL**, FOUNDER OF THE **WHITE TAPES** LABEL, TOUR AND EVENT PROMOTER, AND ALL-ROUND GOOD GUY. HE PAINTS A VIVID PICTURE OF CURRENT US UNDERGROUND MUSIC SCENES IN NE AMERICA. PLACE: THE BON VIVANT DINER, BROADWAY, NYC. DATE: 12TH JUNE 2006.

EP The first thing I ever heard by The SB would be that split CDR with Sapat, but I'd like you to tell me about that limited LP.

RW The LP was our self-titled debut, after about five tapes and a lot of CDRs. We just assumed that some day somebody would offer to do a record, but nobody expressed any real interest until after we'd put out a record ourselves. On our last tour, the third show in Columbus Ohio worked out perfectly. Our performance was about twenty minutes long. On the drive back to New York we talked about how that piece might potentially make for a good

Russ, Michelle Zilles, and Lea after the first Blues Control show - Brooklyn NY - January 15 2006 - photo by Mike Kleinsteuber

LP side, if the recording came out well. And it did, so I figured it was time. We'd already been playing for seven years. The A-side...we had given that to Joel to put out on Spite, years ago. Once the B-side was ready-to-go, I immediately thought "Perhaps I should get that back from Joel, and use it." Eric [Maurer] did another edit, and then we had both sides of the LP. I like the A-side when it gets very spare and meandering.

EP So you put it out yourself.

RW I pressed 125 copies. There were two editions. One had regular artwork, and 25 were packaged in recycled covers, for friends.

EP Do you record everything you play?

RW Eric documents everything. He has a really nice digital recording set-up, and some great microphones. Eric has an archive of over 450 recordings by The SB. I'm really bad at

archiving stuff, and Lea and I don't have a proper recording set-up at home. We just borrowed a four-track from Mark [Bajuk].

EP So tell me about that LP, it seems very interesting the way that it was recorded.

The SB - Yonkers NY - June 10 2006 - photo by Adam Burr

RW I wasn't there when the A-side was recorded, but I believe Eric played his guitar through a Moog Sonic Six, and Mark played a synthesiser. Adam is on it too, and he usually plays the electronics he builds, and processes our live sound. Adam and I met in high school, and he was often working on electronics projects. He built a box that set off the bells in this one school building. If we ever wanted to get out of class early, one of us would ask to use the restroom, go down to the sculpture area where Adam had hidden the box, and flip the switch! Anyway, I think there's a direct line into Eric's recording gear from Adam's live processing box. It's a very elastic sound.

EP The band existed before you joined?

RW Yes, but it didn't have a name. I was booking and promoting my first show in New York at about that same time, so I booked them to open. The show was at a pizza parlour in Brooklyn. I didn't play, because I'd only jammed with them twice before, and I thought of myself as the promoter, not the performer. I needed a name for the flyers, and they chose the name Shy Brick. Later, when I started playing with them regularly, I thought that if I were to change the name it might be easier for me to get shows. For a time, in my imagination, we were The SB R.I.P. – The Shy Brick Rest in Peace – but then this woman I had known but had had a falling out with contacted me out of the blue, and her initials are SB. Back when she and I were hanging out she wasn't known as SB, but apparently she had started abbreviating her name in emails, and took offence and thought it was a dig. The SB R.I.P. – "Do you wish me dead?" – Oh God, no, not at all. So then we changed it to The SB and that was that.

Blues Control @ Goodbye Blue Monday - Brooklyn NY - April 9 2006 - photo by Mike Kleinsteuber

EP What was it like, the very first time you played with The SB? Did you fit right in straight away?

RW I think so. I had been playing in a similar group, Host, and that had gone through a number of changes. Host started off with two guitars and a saxophone, sort of Borbetomagus meets Dead C-ish improv. Gradually that changed. Rob [Hall] bought a synthesiser, and we all began to bring in more instruments. Host played exactly one show, in Port Chester, which is north of the city. Matt Valentine set it up, and we opened for The Irving Klaw Trio, who loaded in during our set and put all of their gear right in front of us. I got a good recording of that show though, and that was the first White Tape. Towards the end of Host, Ryan [Taylor] was really pushing acoustic instruments on me and Rob. I had no objection to playing acoustic instruments per se, but I didn't think we were very good at it. My reaction was, "This has potential, but I'd also like to keep chipping away at some of the ideas we've already been working on." Ryan was vehement: "No, I only want to play acoustic instruments from this point forward." That was when it ended.

When I joined The SB the vibe was similar to Host in its earliest incarnation…an exploratory, droning, guitar-based sound, not unlike AMM. I immediately liked Eric's guitar playing. He's always had a very distinct style. Everybody was friendly, and

The SB @ Dumba - Brooklyn NY - July 19 2003 - photographer unknown

open to whoever came down, and we all brought friends in to hang out and play.

EP AMM, besides improvising, also had lengthy discussions amongst each other as to what they thought they were doing, what the music was about, what did it mean, and perhaps the discussions helped them improve. Do you do anything like that?

RW Absolutely not. One thing that's interesting about The SB is that we rarely talk about what we do. Because of changes in instrumentation, and membership, the sound has evolved over time, but there are so many themes that constantly recur, it's almost as if The SB existed before we ever played together… we're just conduits. I suspect most members also prefer not to tamper with that special chemistry. There's rarely a need to promote any explicit agenda within the group.

EP It's rare to have a rapport among musicians. This is probably a silly question, but is there one stand-out core member who got things together, is an instigator, or somebody with an idea?

RW In terms of the group's sonic identity, everybody has contributed equally. At this point, nearly everyone plays a synthesiser though, perhaps because the group's sound lent itself to that. I bought one when I stumbled upon a cheap, used Korg Delta. It's a polyphonic analogue synthesiser. In Watersports we use a Yamaha CS-1.

EP Are you skilled in programming these devices?

Artwork for Blues Control and Guns N' Roses split tape - 2006 - collage by Lea Cho

RW I learned intuitively. I've been playing the Korg for a while now though. That's all I've played in The SB for at least two years. My interest in the guitar has come and gone, but this synthesiser has been consistently engaging for a very long time. Mark was the first person in The SB to play synth. He has a collection.

EP You must have played live quite a few times.

RW We used to play regularly around New York, and we've gone on several tours – down south, to the mid-west, and also Massachusetts. When we went down south, the shows got progressively better as the tour went on. The last two shows were great. It was a weird tour though. The group shed members along the way, as people left to head back north. There's a recording from New Orleans that is beautiful. I wasn't there, but it's one of the strongest things we've ever put out. It's unfortunate that The SB doesn't play more often; the music gets better the more often we play. We're more serious now about shows than we used to be, and it's more focused, perhaps because we don't play out as often as we used to.

EP Does the band have any ambitions for more tangible product to be released?

RW We just recorded for an LP for Qbico. We'll spend the rest of this summer putting that together. There's a CDR coming out on Black Velvet Fuckere too.

EP Let's hear more about White Tapes. When did it start?

RW I put out the Host tape in December of 1998. There have been long stretches of time when the label was dormant though.

EP I understand you inherited a legacy catalogue from another label?

Watersports @ a hostel - Tarcento Italy - September 16 2005 - photo by Laurent Cartuyvels

RW Destroy All Music. At this point I can't remember the name of the guy in the UK who started it, but it was a pretty decent label in the mid-to-late 1990s, part of the same scene as Chocolate Monk and Shrimper. Paul Chavez, who was in a band called Tranquil, he was the first person to "inherit" the label, and he ran it for at least a couple of years. Then I think he got bored of music in general. We were in touch because I worked at Matador Records, doing mail order, and he was a customer. One day he wrote to me, "Do you want to take over Destroy All Music?" Paul was in Texas at that time, a political activist. A friend of his in Pennsylvania had all the masters, but apparently it was difficult to motivate that person to pack up everything and send it to me. After discussing it with my friends, and thinking about it some more, I realised there was absolutely no reason for me to wait. I decided to start White Tapes instead, ironically on the same day that I finally received the package with Destroy All Music's masters.

I had already done something similar in high school. I would get together regularly with friends and play music. I loved to record, doing overdubs between 2 boomboxes, and I had a drum machine, a keyboard, and a guitar. We'd record these ridiculous songs. I never wanted to sing, so I would have my friends come over and sing the lyrics I had written. I'd have these quasi-anti-authoritarian screeds written out, ready-to-go. Then I'd put together artwork and dub copies for everybody. Essentially, I had a tape label even back then.

EP So from an early time, you were interested in the DIY aesthetic.

Watersports @ Exit Art - La Superette - New York NY - December 18 2005 - photographer unknown

RW Yeah, when I was in junior-high my best friend's older brother got us into a lot of the SST and Touch & Go stuff, and that music went hand-in-hand with skateboarding. When I was really little I collected disco 45s. Later on I heard Run DMC, and would buy rap tapes. At some point my friend's mom took us to an Iron Maiden concert. That was nuts! I used to skateboard all day every day, and listen to music all night. There were a few radio programs I would listen to obsessively, particularly on WZBC, Boston College's radio station. I remember hearing Funkadelic's *Maggot Brain* and ESG's *Erase You*, and having these revelatory experiences.

EP Can you name some of the artistes you've released?

RW Let's see...Badgerlore. Birchville Cat Motel. A couple of John Olson projects. Reynols, and their first collaboration with Pauline Oliveros. Wagstaff – he played in Inca Eyeball. Also, my own recordings under various monikers.

Humectant Interruption *Certain Blacks* – apparently that was a lot of people's early favourite. I found a $1-store in downtown Brooklyn, and bought fifty dolls – a black woman with high heels on, but naked otherwise. Its eyes opened when it was upright, and closed when it was horizontal. I put a black spray painted tape, a White Tapes button, and the doll, all in the original bag, and sealed it with a new label that I had designed to look like something you might actually find in a store. In fact, I put one of

Watersports @ Brooklyn Fire Proof - Brooklyn NY - December 10 2005 - photo by Mike Kleinsteuber

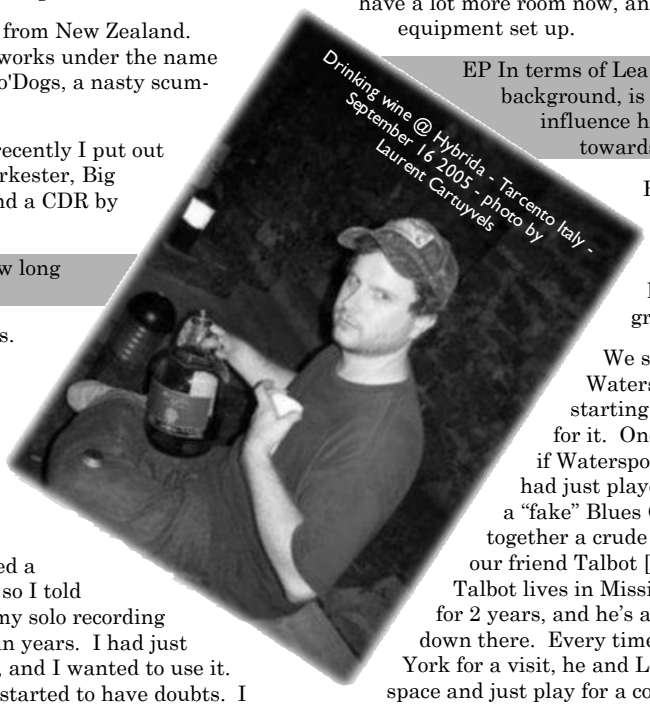
those tapes back in the store where I bought the dolls.

Another favourite – Richard Francis, from New Zealand. Besides recording beautiful ambient works under the name Eso Steel, Richard was also in The Ho'Dogs, a nasty scum-punk band.

Those were all early releases. More recently I put out tapes by Raw Thug, HZMT, Alvars Orkester, Big Whiskey, a 7" by Air Conditioning, and a CDR by Ones with Jeph Jerman.

EP Let's hear about Watersports. How long has that been going?

RW It's been about two and half years. It's me and Lea. We started playing together because this guy Steve Gigante, who used to play in Deerhoof...he had a project called Dark Inside the Sun. He wrote to me looking for a show, but ended up booking it himself at the Knitting Factory. Steve wrote again to see if I wanted to play, and I had never played a show by myself, but I felt like trying, so I told Steve to book me under the name of my solo recording project, Rhuem, which I hadn't done in years. I had just bought that Korg synthesiser though, and I wanted to use it. Of course, shortly after confirming, I started to have doubts. I asked Lea if she wanted to play with me, and she said yes, and so our first Watersports show was the two of us (as Rhuem), Steve, Fat Worm of Error, and Lucas Abela, during a blizzard on a Sunday night. It was a fun show. I don't think we were very good, but good enough to want to try again, in Miami at the International Noise Conference a couple of months later. To this day I've never played a solo show.



Drinking wine @ Hybrida - Tarcento Italy - September 16 2005 - photo by Laurent Cartuyvels

Lea grew up playing classical piano. Her mom went to Juilliard and is one of the top piano teachers in Richmond Virginia. Lea played Carnegie Hall when she was very young, only seven or nine! However, when she was a teenager, she gave up piano. In Blues Control, Lea plays keyboard and harmonica, and she sings sometimes. Early on in Watersports, Lea mostly played percussion, but now she usually plays synthesiser or keyboard. Watersports started to become a serious endeavour when we toured with 2/5 BZ. We got better just by continuing to play together.

At one point I started to feel burnt out, and I didn't know what to do in Watersports. There were three labels based in our old house: Spite, Palsy and White Tapes, and three different "bands": Ones, Humectant Interruption, and Watersports. So, we all had a big party. Ones played, Humectant Interruption played after nearly everyone had left, and our friends Don and Tony Rettman spun records. Instead of performing, Lea and I put together an outdoor installation, which involved ripping up our garden and burying our percussion instruments, as a symbolic end to Watersports phase 1. We also incorporated a lighting display, a water fountain, and a ghostly piece of music looping on a makeshift outdoor stereo system. Our guests got pretty drunk though, and dug up the percussion instruments and started banging on them until our neighbour's caretaker came over to complain. People were "surfing" on metal folding chairs in the kitchen, while downstairs, people were diving on mattresses and imitating professional wrestling moves. It was a mess. Apparently one person got so upset that he cast a hex on our house the following day.

After that party, Lea and I threw most of our instruments in the trash. We were at an impasse, so we took a break. Half a year later, Pete Nolan wrote and asked "Does Watersports want to play with Magik Markers at Tonic?" By that point we had bought a couple of new instruments, and had started talking about what to do, so we said "yes." We've been playing consistently ever since.

We recently moved into a new space, even further out of Manhattan, with the intention of being more productive. We have a lot more room now, and we can leave our music equipment set up.

EP In terms of Lea and what you say about her background, is there anything you've done to influence her away from classical music towards the avant-garde?

RW Oh no, when I met Lea she was already interested in electronic music like Tod Dockstader, and psychedelic rock like Skip Spence. She had a lot of great records in her collection.

We started Blues Control after Watersports. We had been joking about starting a rock band, and we had a name for it. One day Brian Osborne wrote to see if Watersports wanted to play a show, but we had just played, so before I wrote back I put up a "fake" Blues Control webpage and cobbled together a crude MP3 from a jam we'd done with our friend Talbot [Adams], two years previous. Talbot lives in Mississippi; we were college roommates for 2 years, and he's active in the garage rock scene down there. Every time Talbot would come up to New York for a visit, he and Lea and I would get a rehearsal space and just play for a couple of hours and record. So I took one of those songs, slowed it down, edited it on the fly using awful software, put it up on the webpage, and said to Brian, "We have a new band. Would you be interested in booking Blues Control instead?"

Blues Control is similar to Watersports insofar as we run everything through a mixer, but whereas Watersports is grounded in New Age music and environmental records, Blues Control reflects our love for blues-rock and psych. We'll put

Flyer for show @ La Miroiterie - Paris France - September 9 2005 - artist unknown

Blues Control @ East River Amphitheater - New York NY - August 19 2006 - photo by Toby Carroll

together our own rhythm tracks, or sometimes loop samples off records, and then play over those tapes in performance. The show we did last week, during one song we just played over a song by Rainbow. Many of the same basic principles are applied to both bands, however. Do you like Pink Floyd?

EP Up to a point. *Atom Heart Mother* is good. I like the expensive sound of those EMI recordings, where you can tell a lot of money's been put into the production.

RW In Blues Control we strive to make our music very dense. We aim for a "Big sound", with limited means.

EP It's funny that *Vital Weekly*, in reviewing The SB record, assumed that it must be a lo-fi recording. In fact, it seems from what you've said that there's some care and attention on your part in getting the sound right.

RW Eric has recorded a lot of Watersports and Blues Control shows. He also recorded Sapat's record for Siltbreeze, and that Sonic Youth tribute to Stan Brakhage. He has a great mobile rig. We're usually pretty careful when it comes to engineering and mixing. Maybe it isn't obvious to most people, but our recordings sound the way we want them to sound. Otherwise, we wouldn't release them.

EP You've played with Scott Foust recently in Amherst?

RW Yeah, that was great. When we put together the second Watersports tour, I wanted to send something short and sweet to the promoters, so I put together a no-label CDR, and it had our photographs on it. It was the first time I'd ever used a photograph of myself in any music-related artwork. My face was obscured by a pint glass though! Anyway, I've been a fan of Scott's music for years. Not that I've collected everything, but I've been aware of it, and I like it. I saw Tart play a few years ago at free103point9 Gallery, and it was amazing. So Joel said "This CDR looks a bit Swill Radio-esque, maybe you should send a copy to Scott." So I did, and apparently Scott didn't even listen to it. I approached him later to see if Tart would play a show, and he recognised our band name, so Scott finally got around to listening to our CDR, and he actually really liked it. That show was so much fun. It was Scott Foust solo, Sapat, Watersports, and Spectre Folk. I expected to maybe get a little preview in the *Village Voice*, but the music editor at *Time Out*, Mike Wolf, he's been around for years and he knows all about the late-1990s *Muckraker* / *Bananafish* scene, so he ran a huge photo of Scott Foust in *Time Out*! Hilarious. We've kept in touch with Scott and Karla since then, played a couple of more shows together, and we're going to do a split LP eventually.

Self portrait - Sharon MA - 1991 - photo by Russ Waterhouse

EP And you're a music promoter too.

RW There's this amphitheatre on the Lower East Side, in East River Park. It was in the movie *Wild Style*, but fell into disrepair in the 80s, and became a haven for junkies. At some point a few years ago, Erin Brockovich cleaned it up, and the city started allowing performances again. There's one organisation, East River Music Project, they do a few shows every summer. They have to pay for permits, and rent a sound system, and jump through legal hoops, and they do it all without corporate sponsors. During their first season The SB played there, and I'd been promoting a lot of shows in Brooklyn, so they asked me if I wanted to curate a show the following year. I booked Double Leopards, Valley of Ashes, and WFMU's Brian Turner to DJ in between bands. I also booked 2/5 BZ. It was his first show in the USA. By a stroke of luck, Cat Power agreed to play too. There were over 1000 people there at one point. It was a beautiful afternoon, and everybody put on a great show.

EP What motivates you to do this? The social aspect, or are you just altruistic?

RW I don't know. Meeting cool people, hanging out, and the music itself. If I like something, I just want to share it with other people. I've had to approach everything I do as hobby on some level though. It's a way to pass time, and it's rare that I've made any money. However, that means I can do things on my own terms, and rarely have to compromise. □

www.thesb.org

http://whitetapes.8m.com/

http://www.myspace.com/bluescontrol

Skateboarders - Boston MA - 1991 - photo by Russ Waterhouse

PETER STRICKLAND

The Sonic Catering Band

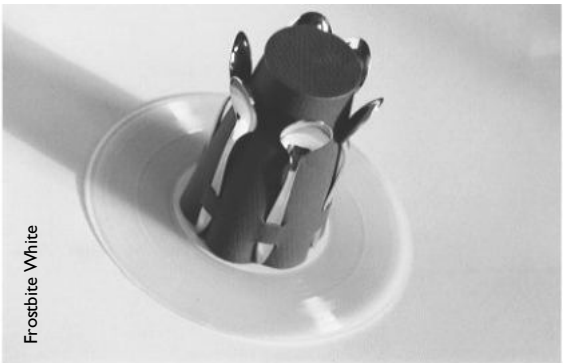
From Reading to Romania

THE SOUND PROJECTOR MEETS PETER STRICKLAND, WHO WAS associated with Tim Kirby and Colin Potter (and other collaborators), to realise the conceptual Sonic Catering Band project which existed around 1998-2001. We first noted it quite late, in issue 13 of this magazine, via the retrospective 2-CD set *Live from the Canteens of Atlantis* (ABSURD RECORDS #30, 2003). It was a lengthy recorded document of sounds created by musicians working with food, and kitchen implements. Or was it? In issue 14 we noted a further record *Seven Transdanubian Recipes* from 2003. 'Sonic Catering Band are more like a clutch of international rebel intellectuals, united by some tenuous interest in the preparation of foodstuffs, and exploring all manner of cabalistic and esoteric avenues of thought thereby', burbled this writer in 2005. 'The chefs, if indeed this is reliable information, look more like secret agents, or refugees from an episode of *The Champions*.'

In June 2006, Strickland himself wrote to me shortly before departing for Slovakia. 'You may or may not be aware,' he remarked, 'that the devastating Alexandra Bastedo, (aka Sharron Macready of *The Champions*) penned a book by the title of *Cat care and cuisine* around the late 90s. She also happens to be a distant relative of Richard Wagner, so you hit on quite an apt culinary/musical link there.' Hastily changing the subject, Strickland added 'I've just finished shooting my first feature in Transylvania. It's an Eastern-European revenge 'Western' set in Romania's Carpathian mountains. It's called *Katalin Varga* and has all the dirt, flies, whips, creaking wood, horses and bad guys that you'd normally expect from the genre. I hope it will appear somewhere in London sometime next year.'

He has also released many interesting things on his Peripheral Conserve label, including a fantastic insect recording 45, and material by his good friends the Bohman Brothers.

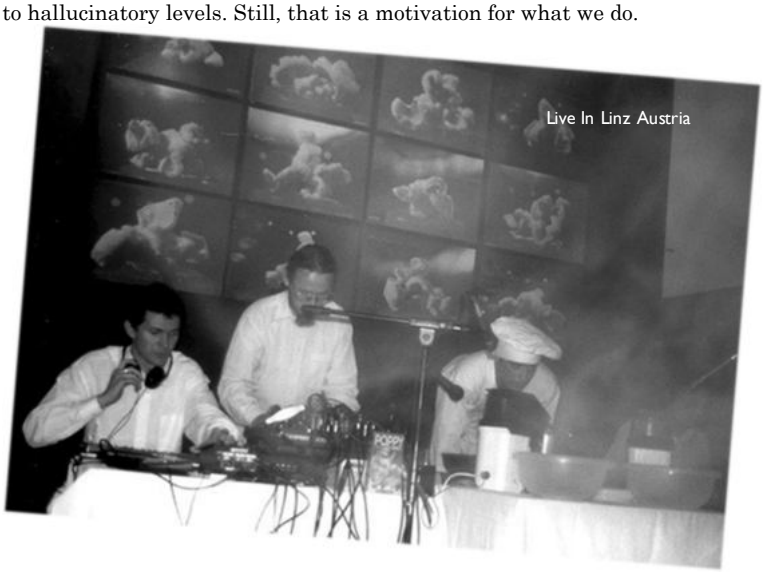
Interview below took place by email in September 2006. However, I dreamed one night that it was actually conducted live. In the dream I met Strickland, and to demonstrate what his music was about, he sellotaped a piece of Parmesan cheese to my finger. Finding out the significance of this image became the main quest of my interview. Images were provided by Tim Kirby. (EP)



Frostbite White

EP Why elect to make sound from 'catering', a field not traditionally associated with its sonic or aural qualities, but rather with delicious tastes and smells of sauces, soups and stews. Are you actually a chef? Or don't you like food at all?

PS There is quite a clear analogy between cooking and sound construction, in terms of the application, mixing and processing of raw elements. It's a straightforward entry point into what some consider wayward music. We were aware of the whole *musique concrète* school and **Sonic Catering** is just localising on one fixed source or subject. But the initial urge to start the whole thing was just to experience the thrill of amplified sizzling and gurgling. We just wanted to project sounds that most Western people ignore to hallucinatory levels. Still, that is a motivation for what we do.



Live In Linz Austria

Originally, I wanted **The Sonic Catering Band** to function solely as a service. The original name was **The Sonic Catering Provisions Unit** and we wanted to set-up our equipment in restaurant kitchens, mic-up all the utensils, pots, pans and so on and pump out this fortified, interculinary mix into the dining quarters at the same volume as muzak. It would be a shift, as opposed to a concert – 8 hour stretches with obligatory cigarette breaks behind the bike sheds. Also, the patrons of whatever restaurant we worked in would partly be responsible for the sound-flow by what they were to choose on the menu. Around late spring 1996, we tried to put the idea into practice. Every establishment we approached told us to sling our hook. So that was that. We were forced into somehow translating the idea of this sound onto record.

The First Supper 10" series then came about. Conceptually, I'm still very proud of that series, but I couldn't listen to it again – maybe just a few of the tracks. It really is the sound of a band in their infancy and getting a little too ahead of themselves with the effects. Drenching a lot of the culinary sounds in standard effects defeated the whole purpose of **Sonic Catering.** During live concerts, it worked now and again, but on record it comes across as an unintentionally reductionist act. **Sonic Catering** is not meant to be abstract or surrealist music. For sure, we are deploying the common surrealist device of making the ordinary seem extraordinary by placing the culinary act within a different context, but there is no absurd or dream-like logic to what we do. None of us wanted to conform to the idea that we're supposedly a bunch of wacky, sonic professors. We turned down pretty much every TV or radio offer on the basis that we felt we'd be patronised in that manner. It's not as if we got that many offers anyway. At its best, the music we make macroscopically reveals pretty much what we all hear but what we don't actively listen to. We've only reached that point a few times. This isn't false modesty. As **Sonic Catering** is an extra-curricular activity for all concerned, we're fortunate enough to be in the position where we can be publicly critical of our own work. Our livelihoods don't depend on this, which also means that we only release a record when we genuinely feel it's worthy

of release. Of course, there's always the risk of us slating what we put out after some years have passed.

For our first album proper, *1093 Budapest IX., Lónyay u. 7., Magyarország (22.09.2002 19.45 – 20.52)* we didn't even bother doing any post-recording tinkering. The album title quite clearly indicates the location, date, time and duration of the cooking act and what you hear is exactly what happened. You also got to eat exactly what you heard as the jam cakes from that session came with the album. Given the nature of the task and the speed at which we had to work, we only made 10 copies of the album, each with a CD-sized jam cake. A totally disposable first album. The best artwork we ever did too in terms of the blank and makeshift functionality.

"The day someone invents a flight case for food blenders, **The Sonic Catering Band** will return to the stage."

Zoviet France were a huge influence at the beginning and the fact that they were anonymous veiled the music in even more mystery. Although we strived for anonymity at the beginning, it was more to do with conforming to the idea of **Sonic Catering** being a mass-produced product with no personality. I was really into the idea of the band being a cold and faceless manufacturing unit. We were once congratulated for not concerning ourselves with image but really that couldn't be further from the truth. A lot

of time was spent thinking about image and presentation as a part of the actual whole as opposed to just the marketing of the band. In hindsight, we should've been much more hard and formal with the design. We could've lost all those track titles too for *The First Supper*. But that's the way; the mass production of an idea marks the onset of endless nitpicking. On our previous outing, *Seven Transdanubian Recipes*, I just gave in and printed our mug shots. A lot of the new members had such impressive facial hair that vanity got the better of us. That's the only recording I can enjoy as a listener. From *Greed* onwards, the tracks really open up at night in pitch-darkness. We made a lot of that album next to a porno studio on a Danube island. The sound insulation prevented either party from hearing one another, so it was work as normal. The only signs of life were during breaks when the actresses could be seen outside in bath robes, puffing on their cigarettes and staring into nothing, ghostly and spent. All that activity definitely lent an atmosphere of sorts to the album.

As for whether I'm a chef or not; I'm a bit of a one-trick pony when it comes to cooking. I can wow guests with a few select dishes and then the rest of the time I'm suffering from culinary illiteracy. So if you wish to avoid disillusionment, stick to being an acquaintance of mine rather than a friend.

EP Have you read Piero Camporesi's theories about the magical properties of food and culinary culture in 15th-16th century Europe? Pretty fascinating, aren't they?

PS You mean *The Magic Harvest: Food, Folklore and Society*? If it weren't for internet search engines, I'd look pretty stupid right now. I'll take your word for it being fascinating. I'll have to read that as I do have a casual, layman's interest in pagan pursuits.

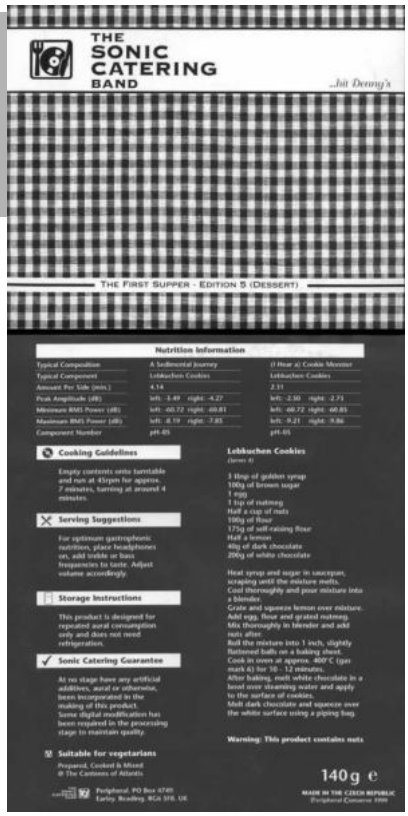
I'm digressing from your point, but coming from a family, rooted both in English and Balkan culture, I've enjoyed a somewhat schizophrenic culinary development. The relationship to food is almost akin to alchemy in the Balkans. There is a very tangible link from man to the earth as food is harvested and livestock slaughtered by families throughout generations. Even city people have that in their blood either from parents or relatives. Mountain pastors literally revolve their daily cycle according to the movements of the sun in the summer. I have great respect for it, but not sure if I could fully subscribe. In certain villages in Romania, the everyday currency is weighed in vegetables or livestock. If you need a witch doctor, it shows far more respect to present her with a live chicken instead of a few million lei.

EP Can a recipe be a metaphor for something else; perhaps a substitute for a musical composition, a set of instructions to gradually gain control of the world, or a message in secret code? What do recipes mean to you?

PS In hindsight, maybe using the recipe as a compositional starting point was a reaction against the explosion of so-called experimental or aleatory music at the time. We wanted to embrace structure and formula or at least wear that conceit on our sleeves. Obviously, the recipe was just a starting point for us and hardly influenced the end product. We would follow each recipe by rote during the recording process and made a point of ritually ingesting the end result, no matter how foul tasting it could be on occasion. As for a recipe forming a secret code, you would think it a far more gratifying solution to espionage than just another monotonous numbers' station.

Regardless of our working methods, the aim was always to create a world of our own. No matter how generic, gimmicky, pointless or just plain bad some of our weaker tracks may be, we can maintain that we've carved out our own sonic niche. Ennio Morricone, DAF, Richard Wagner, Goblin, Zoviet France, all that stuff on the Cramps label - Costin Miereanu and Martin Davorin Jagodic or producers such as Phil Spector, Joe Meek, Bobby Orlando – you put on their records and you're instantly transported. It's their world, their logic and it's really strong. Some of that music might be questionable but I get more out of all the baggage that comes with it than listening to music that serves traditional notions of taste.

EP Listening to the performance of the 'band' on record (if that is indeed what we're hearing) is not without its longeurs, but perhaps the durational aspect appeals to you…I have the sense of a watched pot never boiling. What was it like to be on stage?



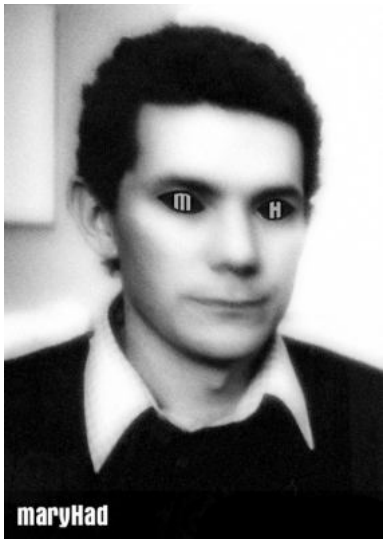
PS Frustrating. Really frustrating most of the time. Our live sets went against the whole purpose of the original shift idea. We appeared onstage and just hammered it out which was immensely gratifying at times. We definitely had our moments and the whole *thing* would just peak at this sustained ferocity. I do have great memories but there were also performances that I'd rather forget. We were betraying our original notions too much. Seeing **My Bloody Valentine** live put ridiculous ideas into my head and we wanted that overwhelming surge of power and volume but had no means and most importantly, no reason to implement it. It veered too dangerously towards gimmick. We were getting into our thirties and you can't be trashing food blenders anymore. Maybe in your fifties, but not in your thirties and forties. Only the front row would get to eat what we made and it was usually just the same greedy bastards coming back for seconds. It used to be such a wretched mess afterwards and I hate wasting food. We stopped on a high in 2001 and then got seduced back into playing live for the wrong reasons – money and travel. Now we're just keeping ourselves to ourselves. Actually, we can't even do that since we're spread over four countries. I don't miss it so much. How many art venues can you show up in? How many times do you have to put together the usual rhetoric so the organisers' funding bodies can see that you've met the criteria for so-called groundbreaking art? Sometimes I just want to say we're only putting on a concert so we can get blown backstage. Carting food and utensils around is not so much fun either. The day someone invents a flight case for food blenders, **The Sonic Catering Band** will return to the stage.

EP I've often suspected that the activities of Sonic Catering are simply to disguise your covert operations, which may be something to do with international espionage. Any truth in these charges? Have Interpol ever managed to intercept you, say in Marrakech or Cairo?

PS Krkoviĉka means pig's neck in Slovak.

EP Might I learn more about what Mr Colin Potter has contributed to your activities?

PS Colin Potter is one of many **S. Catering** special guests. We came close to asking him to join full-time, but he's too busy with his own music. Besides, we already have another Colin in full-time membership. Have two members of a band with the same forename and you end up confusing the fans. So Colin is called upon whenever we feel its right and he has time. We first went over to his place in 1997 to get four of our *First Supper* tracks fixed. The man has a gift for dropping the mix into that sonic Bermuda Triangle. His version of Jonathan Coleclough's *Period* is really possessed. I also like a few of Colin's early tapes, though I gather he'd have something different to say about that. Pál Tóth (*Seven Transdanubian* cover star) has every single one of those early electronic releases.

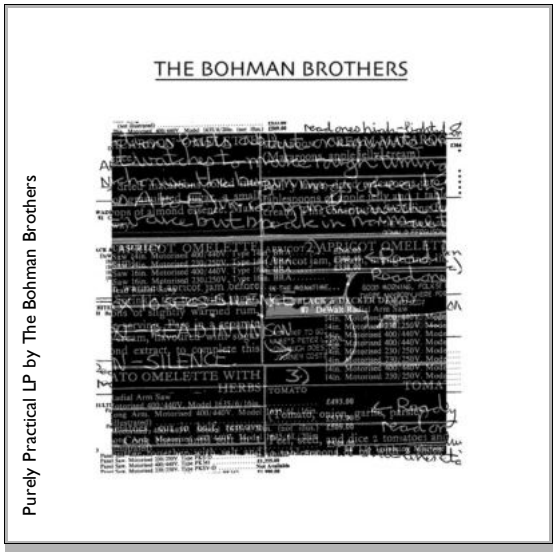


We got together again with Colin in 2002 for some of the *Seven Transdanubian* tracks. I put the base track together with Colin for *The Lamb is the Light Thereof* which was a simple loop of oven gas pitched at various semitones and combined in different sequences. Colin continued with his own version of that and I joined Dan Hayhurst in London to finish off our version. The Hungarian influence was quite prominent. I just wanted to come as close as possible to Ligeti's choral works or even Kodály's.

Colin joined us for a live concert in Hamburg. That was almost a full house then - six members and aurally, it was close to a case of 'too many cooks' despite us enjoying the rare pleasure of each others' company in one place. Other special guests include Zsolt Kovács from Diósd in Hungary. He made a really important contribution to the last album. Dan Hayhurst also put in a lot and of course, there are the core members, Tim Kirby and Colin Fletcher. So much is down to those two. The band wouldn't be what it is without that core, even though we barely see each other these days. The whole network of the band is very loose which is probably what keeps us together. Despite our dietary differences, none of us have fallen out. I imagine that if you were stuck in the back of a van with a bass player breaking wind 124 days of the year, you'd think about handing in notice. But luckily for us, we socialise or work under far more civilised conditions.

Pretty much all those involved in **Sonic Catering** have their own projects and/or labels. Way too many to mention; off the top of my head, Tim Kirby does a lot of his music, often under the **Lessons Around Us** guise and has something coming out on *State Sanctioned Recordings*. He also has his own **smallprint** record label in Bristol, Colin Potter has his own projects as well as working with **Ora, Monos, Nurse with Wound, Current 93, Paul Bradley, Jonathan Coleclough, The Hafler Trio** and **Andrew Liles**. RR Habarc has his own **Avult** label in Pilisszántó. Dan Hayhurst has his own project, **Scultpure** as well as working with **They Came from the**

Stars; I Saw Them and **Vanishing Breed**. Zsolt Sőrés seems to be soundtracking one dance performance after another all over Europe. Zsolt Kovács plays with **Budapastis** and **Abstract Monarchy Trio**. Colin Fletcher plays with his wife, Jane in many a folk band around Oxford. Jozef Cseres is involved in writing, organising and participating in a multitude of events as well as running his own label, **Hermes Discorbie** and Pál Tóth continues to insist on taking no prisoners with his electronic music under the *én* moniker and also with his own 15-year running radio show in Budapest, showcasing the likes of Alvin Lucier, **AMM**, Paul Panhuysen, **Reynols**, etc.



Purely Practical LP by The Bohman Brothers

EP It also seems just perfect somehow that you should have some association with the Bohman Brothers. Do you believe in the possibility that like-minded souls are naturally drawn to each other by powerful unseen forces, or is it simply a series of chance events?

PS Like-minded souls are drawn together by Rupert Murdoch now. That's the sad thing about myspace; it's taken the chance element out of socialising. I first came across Adam Bohman at a Charlemagne Palestine concert in 1998. He was sitting in front of me and continuously stretched his arms above his head. It wasn't until three years later that we actually had a drink together. *Music and Words* by Adam Bohman is a masterpiece on the much underrated **Paradigm** label. I don't know if we're like-minded souls but I'm certainly drawn to something very quintessentially English about the Bohmans. For me, the Bohmans belong in the Albion of Charles Dickens. If the Brothers Quay focused on London the way they've focused on the mythical idea of old Eastern Europe, for sure, you'd find the Bohmans' shoe brushes behind a dusty shop front. They also happen to be one of the greatest double acts in music, right up there with **Suicide** and **Sparks**. The closure of the Bohman Bonnington nights was a great loss. There was none of the aggressive, didactic marketing normally associated with these things. They just went about their business without having to harp on about how 'cutting edge' the night was going to be.

My favourite Sonic Catering concert took place at the Bonnington. I was tinkering with a very generic, barely audible pre-recorded piece from the mixer. The audience were struggling to hear and all of a sudden, Adam, sitting at his usual makeshift cash desk, produced a pack of crisps from his blazer pocket with such an innocent lack of fanfare. The audience could be heard tutting and just generally becoming agitated as Adam chomped away on his crisps and drowned out any sound that was coming from the mixer. As soon as Jonathan artfully produced a pack of crisps from his blazer pocket, the audience started to twig. I had a whole stash of crisps hidden under the mixer which I threw to the audience and gradually I turned up the pre-recorded sounds of crisp-munching. It was a totally throw-away five minute junk food special.

Last year, we did a short or test film together called *Berberian Sound Studio* in which the Bohmans played an inept pair of foley artists in the 50s, applying sound effects to a hackneyed exploitation pic. I'm hoping to extend that at some point into something more.

Colin Potter

Putting out *Purely Practical* by the Bohmans was a highlight of running a miserable, dead-end label. I'd endured bullshit on the previous release and this was a no-fuss joy to put out. Very fast – from hearing *Purely Practical* performed at the Bonnington for the first time to the record on the turntable, maybe 2 or 3 months. Adam gave me the 'lyric' sheets used and I rustled something up with our designer, John Forrester in one afternoon in Bracknell. It was fantastic. I still love that record. It's one of my all-time favourite British 7" singles. I really wanted to put out an album of theirs and do it as a gatefold LP release, **Cramps** label-style, but the money was drying up and what with **Anomalous** distribution closing in the States and my emigration from the UK, it was time to stop the label. Besides, there are only 14 numbers in the pH scale. (our catalogue reference). Sadly in this climate, putting out this kind of music, there are more lows than highs. You can get in such a spin over the final record when it arrives at your door and you believe you have brought a work of great beauty into the world, yet that work of great beauty is housed in the shuddering banality of cardboard. That's what you get – cardboard boxes all over the place, as if your bedroom was a dry goods' depot. If I start a label again, I should work on a design for the boxes that I spend more time looking at than the records. But really, I'm very proud of what we achieved with the label.

EP I had a dream last night about meeting you and conducting this interview with you. In it, to prove some point about sonic catering, you sellotaped a small piece of Parmesan cheese to my index finger. Can you discern any significance in this striking image?

PS If you dreamt about Stilton, financial fortune would shower upon you.

EP Quite a powerful insect record you released on your Peripheral Conserve

label there. I see it's salvaged from the National Sound Archive. I've been told they hold a lot of interesting unreleased materials there and they wished more people would take an interest. Were you welcomed with open arms at that establishment?

PS We barely sold any copies but I suspected that would happen. Too bad it didn't sell, but still, I had a blast going to the British Library and detonating my head with hours of entomological recordings. Richard Ranft was the main person I communicated with. An absolute gentleman and a fine wildlife recorder to boot and the same can be said for both Jim Reynolds and David Ragge. Understandably, both Richard Ranft and the entomologists didn't just want to jump into a project with a label known for clanking out pots and pans. It took a long time to convince them that I would honour the integrity of the research they underwent. I did a lot of my own research at the Entomology Library at the Natural History Museum and I could've given everything up to work there as deep down, I'm a frustrated, failed naturalist. The mole cricket single was very personal in that regard. It alluded to a time long past. I had a very lucky childhood and would spend most weekends walking in awe around forests and heaths near Aldershot, where my father grew up. It made sense to choose a species that is now extinct from Britain. I was thrilled when Denys Ovenden loaned me his mole cricket portraits for the cover. He used to design the insect guidebooks I used during my childhood, so that was quite important. But regardless of all that claptrap, I just wanted to churn out a noise record for the kids. *Gryllotalpa vineae* listened to out of context and at high volume doesn't sound too dissimilar to some of the early **Whitehouse** stuff. The record is advertised (within the field notes) as being useful for classification purposes, which is true. Those two mole cricket species can only be differentiated by the sound they produce. But really it's a noise record without all the usual transgressive trimmings.

EP Any link to be found between insects and catering? I gather that locust eggs are prized as quite a delicacy by some. Ever tried such a dish yourself?

PS No. I'm more preoccupied with the imminent second generation of fleas due to hatch from within my sleeping bag.

EP Please tell me something about this film you've made recently. A historical drama? Can we really learn anything from the past, in an age when only the last five minutes mean anything?

The film is called *Katalin Varga* or maybe *The Carpathian Wife* or maybe something else. It's not fixed yet. It's a revenge flick, set in Romania's Carpathian mountain region. I was interested in showing a character responsible for a great act of brutality and yet the audience only see him after he's redeemed himself. The audience never witness the atrocity this man has committed and only see him a decade later as a very kind, loving man with his wife. Usually, the *bad guy* in a film acts like the bad guy and I'm not so interested in that. An avenging angel by the name of Katalin Varga scales the Carpathians by horse, ruthlessly searching for this man. Nothing quite ends up as it should, but then again, anyone promoting their film is going to say that, so don't necessarily listen to me. I don't want to say too much more about the film itself until it's finished. It's taking the standard female revenge genre as a starting point for good people turning bad and bad people turning good. The film is pretty brutal although if you're expecting blood, you'll be disappointed. Can't afford the stuff anyway.

We shot the film in 17 days on Super 16mm on a very low budget (less than 20,000 GBP) and it will be at least a 90 minute feature. After displaying such self-criticism throughout these pages, I can now treat you to a little hubris by saying I feel pretty pleased with myself and the cast/crew for getting the film shot so fast and cheaply. We had a very small crew which, contrary to opinion, does make things faster: 10 people - two assistants, three for the camera and lights, two for the sound, a still photographer and two chefs. It was very hard work and we all had to sleep on the floor in one house, along with the cast and share the same bathroom, which on occasion would have no water at all, let alone cold water. Making a film in the Balkans has its chaotic downsides, but at the same time, I got away with so much. If I made this film in the UK, I'd be ruined by a succession of lawsuits. But really, nobody got seriously hurt or was forced to do anything they didn't want to do. Everyone was paid average wages, apart from the focus puller and stills photographer, who both volunteered to work for only travel and living costs. Everybody was warned in advance about what was involved in making the film and it was their choice. Luckily all the cast and six members of the crew were from the Transylvanian region of Romania so enduring harsh living and working conditions wasn't so much of a leap. The chefs often had to work in really bad conditions and make a fire outside to cook the soup and wash utensils in the toilet. There were many days without any phone signal and the chefs just had to wait for us to return for food. We'd always turn up several hours late by which time the food turned cold. A really thankless job that was done with great grace. My assistant, Anikó was briefly hospitalised by a loopy dog under my supervision and she had every right to sue me but thankfully that blame-mentality is not so prevalent in the Balkans. We got involved in various minor capers in certain villages and at the border, but overall it was a smooth shoot and there was nothing to make a big deal of. Compared to a Werner Herzog film, we had no problems whatsoever. We were just tired and overworked, that's all. I'm glad I don't have to do those 18 hour smelly train journeys to Romania anymore. By the time I go back to show the film, I guess most of the people involved will already be in the UK, striking terror into the hearts of *Daily Mail* readers.

I was strongly advised not to make this film on the budget I had, but if you do your homework and keep the crew to as few people as possible, it can be done. The problem is your typical producer in Budapest is too used to the canapé lifestyle from film festivals. I always had to wait for them in overpriced coffee bars and see them pull up in a taxi. None of the producers I was tentatively involved with could be bothered to go to Romania with me. They were more concerned about whether I was going to hire a make-up person than more practical stuff such as getting a chef so people don't starve in the forest. They always go for the lazy option; hire a service team in Romania. Hire a service team in any country and you'll get the same postcard locations at an outrageous cost.

Nothing ever worked out with any producer in the end. I put three years into preparing for the film and I now have so many Romanian stamps on my passport, I've lost count. That was the only way – to go back again and again and know everyone in the locations personally enough to be invited to their funeral. That whole period of preparation was in a way far more eventful, chaotic, frustrating, shocking and beautiful than the actual shoot. The natural environment is far from the quaint English countryside. Even when you're just riding a horse, you see a permanent black cloud of horseflies ready to engorge themselves on already-supped blood. It does take it out on

you when you've seen a horse's limp cock oozing with blood from those bastard flies or scores of frogs lying half-alive and helpless after having their legs sliced off.

Originally I was going to make the film in Albania. I was on good terms with the National Security Advisor to Fatos Nano, only Sali Berisha's government were soon voted in again and it was no longer easy to get the support I needed. Civil unrest flared up again in Kosovo around early 2004, some of the borders closed and you just think, it's difficult enough making a film. I have many relatives in Albania and revenge is something that runs very deep in the Northern culture. The Albanians have an ancient law known as the *kanun* (blood feud), which plagues some communities to this day. It has its own set of rules, which people largely adhere to. You can't avenge your enemy inside their house or outside the house after dark. Only men over the age of fourteen can be a target. This film isn't about that but still, that was one of many reasons to shoot in Albania. I had a great time in Albania, being driven around in a black Mercedes with demonically loud turbo-folk pumping out from the speakers. There is an extremely strong tradition of hospitality there, quite unlike anywhere else, but it was a little too difficult to keep going there and organise things, for a first film anyway. The actual country wasn't so important – I just needed mountains. If Reading or Bracknell had mountains I'd film there.

Film is in my blood far more than music. I listen to music far more than I watch film, yet I'm compelled to make films far, far more than music. Seeing *Eraserhead* at the Scala Cinema changed my life and from then on, I pretty much learnt about film from that cinema or the NFT. Powell/Pressburger, Nic Roeg, Werner Herzog, Luis Buñuel, Andrei Tarkovsky, Sergei Paradjanov, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Brothers Quay, early Jan Švankmajer, early David Lynch, Paul Morrissey, Jordan Belson – I could happily go on. Sadly it's such an expensive medium and funding is always an obstacle. I had to abandon or put aside many projects. I was left broke through much of the 90s after making a short film called *Bubblegum*. I got so sick of these self-promoting curators at festivals and film clubs, travelling around the world at the expense of film makers' hard work. They can never pay you of course, as they 'didn't break even at the door.' I always go out of my way to pay my cast and crew unless someone expressly volunteers regardless of whether I'll break even or not. If these curator pricks just had the courtesy to call you up and thank you and say a few words about how the screening went, did the audience cry or something like that, then I might be less of a misanthrope.

I forgot to mention that the film is not set in the past. The audience might think that during the first fifteen minutes or so but that's what I wanted as that is how life is in many parts of Romania. I love that anachronism when you see someone talking on their mobile phone whilst on a horse cart. I wanted to capture Romania before it changes but that seems unlikely to happen. A lot of farmers and villagers have the education and financial resources to change but tradition runs so deep in their blood.

As for your point about learning anything from the past, that's a question for politicians.

EP State your full name and country of origin for the record, please. What are you doing in Eastern Europe?

PS Peter Strickland. Born and raised in Reading. I'm currently living in Bratislava because of work but I'm in Budapest two or three days a week because of editing. It's bizarre that going from country to country on the train is cheaper than going from Reading to London.

If you lived in Reading, you wouldn't need an answer to the second question. Reading is just a place to make money, get drunk and catch chlamydia. The romantic quest is a falsehood in that wretched town. If you aspire to or are compelled to anything different, then at best you suffer ridicule. I have no issue with people wanting to conform, make money and so on, but all too often the finger is wagged at you for being a so-called freak and if ever a town had wagging fingers, then Reading wags them like no other. Bizarrely enough, seeing *The Office* after I left England brought on a masochistic nostalgia for those Thames Valley haunts. Reading definitely instilled something in me. I'm not sure if I'd be afflicted with the same yearning if I was galloping around on horseback in the New Forest.

The whole irony is that if you go out on a Friday night in Bratislava, you're faced with the same ruffians you get from Reading, what with all the stag groups coming over. Every weekend you see them heading towards the bordello with the same imperialist swagger. For all the hoo ha certain people make, rightly or wrongly about EU expansion, you see a pretty hypocritical side to that argument when the English come here, behaving like barbarians, thinking they can buy whatever cheap beer, girls or property they like. Romanian friends of mine wonder why it's acceptable for monolingual English landlords to come over and buy up their land and charge high rents when they're greeted in the UK with such unanimous derision as if they're all illiterate warlords on horse carts. The whole argument is very complicated and there are a lot of downsides to EU expansion at both ends but the arguments always go way off the graph into the usual unfounded, scandalous scare mongering. As far as I'm concerned the liberals are just as ignorant as the fascists. Not that I know much better, but being a migrant myself and seeing friends before and after migrating to the UK, I've probably seen more than some wine-swigging MEP in Brussels. From a purely selfish point of view, EU expansion means that I no longer get exotic-looking stamps on my passport.

The last four years have been really incredible, having lived and worked in Romania, Hungary and Slovakia. It's not exactly beer and skittles in those countries, which is partly why everyone hops on the bus to London. But many people soon find out for themselves that London is just another cesspit, albeit a somewhat more glamorous one. I like living here as people are generally less uptight. I just inoculated a friend of mine against Hepatitis B in a crowded restaurant this lunchtime and nobody made a fuss when I got the needle out. Life is far more carefree in that sense. For sure, you can see desperation like nothing you've seen before, especially in Eastern Slovakia and Romania. Too many people live in very grim, cramped conditions but if you're unlucky enough to have a knife pulled on you, it's because someone needs money, not because Cheltenham FC didn't make it to the league. Throughout the Central/East European region, the standard of education is much higher than in the UK and so is the will to learn. People are generally far more civilised.

I don't know if I'll stay in this neck of the woods. I miss England in my own way. There are people and things that I miss. Central/Eastern Europe has its own myriad of domestic and geopolitical problems. Whisky is more expensive and the kids get a little too carried away with **Depeche Mode**, but otherwise life isn't so different. The only thing that really sums it up is, if you fall asleep on a train over here, you can end up all over the place; Belgrade, Vienna, Berlin, Zagreb, Prague, Bucharest, Budapest, Kiev. Fall asleep on a train in London and you end up in Barnsley. □

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Clay Ruby and The Davenport Family

Clay Ruby

Email interview with The Sound Projector September - December 2006

Hello Sound Projector, thanks for taking an interest in our music. The Davenport Family was founded in 2002 as a vehicle for my interest in singer/songwriter and folk music. Over the years, many folks joined the group and contributed to the music.

Eventually the Davenport Family had departed from my original concept for the band and turned into a communal music family band with as many as 13 contributing members. As such things tend to go, the communal aspect itself deteriorated and we were left just a few musicians who continued to jam with each other. Today, the Davenport Family has retired its name and each member has gone on to focus on their own bands and works. In some ways we are still active, many folks from the Davenport Family are working with Zodiac Mountain and Hintergedanken. We dissolved the name Davenport because there already many bands in the USA that use the name Davenport. Plus, several of our members moved away or moved onto other projects.

I have continued to work in a similar vein with the band Zodiac Mountain, which is a similar combination of both songs and group jam sessions. Aside from my solo act, I am involved with Hintergedanken, Wormsblood, Burial Hex, The Zodiacs, and Wooden Wand & The Sky High Band. Hintergedanken is in the studio again working on something new, it took about 6 months to record or debut, so who knows when the new one will be done. I am currently in the beginning process of recording my second solo album also. I play organ and electric piano in the Sky High Band and we also play together in The Zodiacs and Totem. James Toth has contributed to Zodiac Mountain several times too. We met at Pasture Festival in 2004 and we have been collaborating on music and tours since early 2005.

For Totem, James and Jessica Toth wrote a few heavy blues numbers. They sent them to me and I wrote organ and drum parts. Then Keith Woods, James and Jessica came up to my studio and we spent three days recording the first demo. It turned out to be four songs of very hard rock.

EP Your music seems to have absorbed a lot of ideas, themes, and motifs from the history of early American music (as represented on record, at least) - for example gospel, the blues, early country, and folk. Do you personally collect any of this music, listen to it, study it, enjoy it? What do you think this early music can tell us?

CR I grew up in a family that loved and collected Country music and I have always been an avid listener and collector of all kinds of music. However, the early American roots music like blues, folk, hillbilly, gospel, rock and roll and country music are the nearest and dearest to my heart. And this means everything from Jimmie Rodgers to the Bummer Road. I grew up around a lot of Country and Rock music. Of course, I became a metalhead when I was a teenager, Metal is my first true love and it still runs very deep in my life. When I was younger, I played in raging feedback-drenched punk bands. As to my solo releases, the last one (*The Uneven Path*) was

Davenport LP cover

an even mix of electric blues and country/folk songs. This new one is more of the same.

EP At the same time the performances appear to be based around a core of collective / group improvisations; is that accurate? How many key players are there in Davenport? Do you direct the improvisations in any way? Is there any planning beforehand, or editing / selection afterwards?

CR Davenport's earliest music was made alone at our private studio. Eventually I was offered a live gig which prompted me to look for other folks to help pull off a live show.

There are not many people that like to do this sort of music in southern Wisconsin. So, after not long, I started inviting some of my local friends with similar musical interests to join in the fun. Davenport blossomed into a large band based mainly on weekly

(sometimes daily) group improvisations, recording sessions and campfire hootenannies. At the height of this period we were as many as 13 members. As time wore on, we got down to about 3-5 active members. While playing live we were strictly improvising, with nothing more than an occasional casual conversation about what we might do during the performance. In the studio we would have many different types of jam sessions, some where we would have a specific goal in mind and other which were just open group jams. I started inviting more and more folks to the practices and the shows, so it evolved as more folks got involved. I look back on the experience very fondly. It was very inspiring and enjoyable at times.

For the recordings that were released, I edited down the sessions into what seemed like the best parts, then mix and overdub as needed from there.

EP Many songs appear to contain an overt (sometimes an underlying) preoccupation with mortality. Have you chosen this subject the same way a novelist or poet might choose a theme? Or is it more personal than that? Are your observations directed as a warning to mankind?

CR There is a chronic preoccupation with spirit, life and afterlife in all my work. Since childhood, often my writings have been about Supernature and God.

EP Did you release many CDRs or private-press records before gaining ground through wider recognition? From which quarters was this recognition forthcoming?

CR We released a large amount of CDRs and cassettes, one lathe cut record, one full length LP and two full length CDs. These releases were distributed online via underground music networks and at shows on tour, where we always met a wide variety of response.

EP Amongst your released catalogue, regardless of the size of the edition or its distribution, what sorts of images are to be found on the covers? Are there any recurrent or obsessive devices thereon? Do you create artwork yourself?

CR Many of the covers of our releases were graced with artwork from friends of ours from around the world; a few of them were from folks within the band too. Certain recurrent themes are Christ, spirit, primitive man, fire, psychedelic experiences and nature.

EP Where are you based in the USA? Have you ever left this state to tour elsewhere? Were other bands involved, and how did audiences react?

CR We are all from rural places around Wisconsin. We did three tours as Davenport, two tours as Zodiac Mountain, and I have been on many tours with Wooden Wand and the Vanishing Voice and Wooden Wand and the Sky High Band. These tours have taken me to just about every state in America. I have toured with many other bands including The Skaters, Skygreen Leopards, Son of Earth, Islaja, Tomuntonttu, Religious Knives, Anla Courtis, Lau Nau, Pekko Kappi, and many others. Audiences have always been enthusiastic. We have gotten every reaction from dancing, disappointment, screaming, indifference, trance states, clapping, singing, crying and confusion.

"There is a chronic preoccupation with spirit, life and afterlife in all my work."

EP What are the plans for the Skulls Of Heaven label?

CR We will continue to release CDs and LPs for awhile. We just put out a fantastic album by throat singer and nature mimic db Pedersen. We have many exciting releases in store including a Wooden Wand and the Sky High Band live CD and DVD, a collboration between Josephine Foster and the Cherry Blossoms, a 5 x CD compilation box set including tracks by Axolotl, Ashtray Navigations, Pengo, WWVV, Zodiac Mountain, Anla Courtis (from Reynols), and many many more. □

mudboy

Free Matter for The Blind

Hypnosis and Gnosis

THE SOUND PROJECTOR MEETS **MUDBOY** FROM PROVIDENCE IN RHODE ISLAND USA. HE'S A SELF-TAUGHT ORGANIST WHO CAN'T READ MUSIC, AND BELIEVES IN THE POWER OF CASTING TRANCE-LIKE SPELLS OVER HIS AUDIENCES. HE ALSO COMPOSES RADIO DRAMAS SUCH AS *PSICKLOPS*, FOR RELEASE ON HIS OWN IMPRINT FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND. INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE BY EMAIL SEPTEMBER 2006.

EP How did you earn your nickname? In the UK at least, the subversive, burrowing activities of a certain itinerant brought him closer to the earth as he burrowed beneath it, and earned him the nickname 'Swampy', although I suspect you are less mole-like in your endeavours.

MUDBOY Well it's a little weird but - a few years before I started playing music seriously I stole a jacket from the costume room of a theatre that had thrown out a pair of stilts of mine the week earlier. It's a weird story- but anyway I did a little shopping and came out with a few things that I thought were fair game. One was a pretty amazing sort of fencing jacket replica- but it had the word 'mudboy' written on the back. When I started playing shows I wasn't sure what to call myself and I figured If I called myself mudboy I could wear this cool jacket. You can see the jacket in the home page of the website as I am circular sawing the organ.

EP I realise the composite image of keyboards (depicted in *This Is Folk Music*) is a collage photo-composition, but wouldn't it be great to have a device like that in real life?

MUDBOY I do have one in real life. That is a real picture, I mean it's a composite - but its also real. People think I'm joking with home page photo - I am actually circular sawing a Yamaha Electone organ down. Those guts that appear when you load the website are real guts - they are laid out that way so that I don't damage the contacts before I rebuilt them back into another box…

EP Supposing you did have one, what effect would it have on your music?

MUDBOY Well this is weird because you know, especially *This is Folk Music* - a lot of people compare it to Terry Riley's stuff- or maybe Terry Riley's bad dream… (though I hadn't heard of him when I was recording it) - but there is a big difference between us - Terry Riley may be a hippie and smoke a lot of pot, but at least he can really play the keyboards. I'm not a trained musician - I come to music through sound collage and film and sound art and I think about things in those ways. I think about time and the perception of time and mood and increasingly about songs as scenes or spell.

I can't read music, I don't even know any scales. Most of the time I either play the black keys or the white keys if that is even relevant. The keyboard is essentially useful to me because it is amazing. So modifying my keyboards allows me two things - one, it opens up the palette of sounds for me as a composer and secondly it liberates both myself and the audience from focusing on music as the organization of notes according to a tempo. I think what is cool about the growth of 'noise' music as a scene is that although I don't really come to people as a noise musician, the audience is beginning at least to understand some of the musical vocabulary developed by noise. So its easier for me to say OK - we're not here to dance, I want you to fall asleep- or I want a transcendental experience tonight - I want to terrify you.

Boy in the bubble

The new album *Hungry Ghosts* (I think I sent you a copy) is all about that - I have been listening to a lot of dub music and have been impressed about their use of 3-D space and effects - it's not like you know, you have a guitar with a little distortion and some reverb and a delay pedal and they are like okay - lets record. You can tell they just turn that shit on and off whenever it's appropriate- they aren't worried about a consistency in the 'sound' of the instrument. They don't care if you can imagine four dudes playing on a stage - it's not about that - it's about the experience of the music itself. It's very modern that way - very abstract. I have been listening to that and Eno's *Here come the warm jets* which is you know - a pop album, but when you really listen to it - it has this sort of immediacy. It's experimental and everything, and super considered - but it's also somehow really casual. I realized that to make something as terrifying as possible it had to have that

lightness, that casualness.

Hungry Ghosts! is unreleased. I just finished having it mastered... and it marks the end of that phase - I imagine it as a sort of spirit journey, waking up in a series of nested dreams. The big organ with which I played for the last few years is being retired in favor of a new more portable instrument called 'Minnie' I am building now so I can travel and tour in Europe (Nov l-Jan l). That and a bare circuit board called 'bag of guts' which was the innards of the Black Forest Black Sea electronic auto harp. There are some backup musicians on *Hungry Ghosts* you might recognize.... Larkin Grimm and Dave L (from the psych-folk band Urdog). Anyway if I can ever find someone to put it out (I really want vinyl with a die cut sleeve - so we'll see if it happens) I think I will call it the first 'dark dub' record- or maybe 'doom dub', not sure yet.

EP Having heard the live CDR, it seems that the ceremony of the performance is, to you, every bit as important as the music; that includes some basic preparatory rites, perhaps involving incense or making movements on stage An increasing number of artistes would claim they are active in this area (Keiji Haino could probably make a valid claim for it, Sunburned Hand of the Man perhaps less so). I suppose I¹m not actually asking a question here, but maybe you could say a little more.

MUDBOY Oh yeah - I am glad to see you could get that from the CDR. It makes me want to keep it in print! Because you know the recording isn't so hot... But for sure. It became very important to me at some point to not really approach my shows as just some dude up there playing music. There is enough of that in the world - and because I am sort of locked behind the keyboard I really had to make an effort to think about myself as a performer - not just a musician. Increasingly the shows have become more mystical and ritualistic. The live CDR you heard - you know I start out with bells and am walking around the room with incense and everything. The photo I sent, you can see me putting on this weird glow sphere I carry around - and I often play entirely in the dark or with just minimal lighting- but then I'll turn all the lights on, or start throwing firecrackers around.

I think it comes from that Kafka quote about writing the books you would want to read. When I go to a show I want something to happen, and I want it to happen to me, the show should be an event. I don't want to just stand there absorbing different frequencies at different intervals of time. At a rock show or a dance show- that energy is built in physically- you can move around. But if you play spaced out music like I do - the travel has to be internal - I want you to fall asleep, or be terrified - or imagine trudging through a swamp ...but something has to happen in your mind. If it doesn't, I haven't done my job. It's like a spell - I cast my spell and you are in or you are out.

EP Have you ever delved into the darker recesses of the human psyche…perhaps seeking forbidden knowledge about the world of dreams, nightmares, and psychological confusion…in your music, or your sound-art compositions? What have you learned from these interior excursions?

MUDBOY Well I spent a lot of time learning about hypnosis-- which as it turns out is something that happens to us all the time. It is a very natural event that happens to us constantly - sometimes your brain just sort of gets split, it's called disassociation - you know like when you are driving to the store to get some milk and you are thinking, I don't know - when is the magazine going to come back from the printers - and all of a sudden you are there at the store.

If you think really hard you can remember stopping at the light, and putting on your turn signal and slowing down before getting to the stop sign and stuff - but you can't remember thinking about it - your brain was driving the car on auto pilot more or less, while the rest of you was thinking about something going on somewhere else…

Anyway this process of disassociation is pretty common during the day, some people are better at it then others. Hypnosis just takes advantage of the heightened susceptibility during those moments - but just inducing disassociation isn't that difficult. It's pretty common in certain kinds of music - Gamelan for example is better at it then pop music. Pop music really wants your attention, it's in your face the whole time - but Gamelan, the patterns are so complicated that you can't really follow it in any rational conscious way unless you try really hard - but it does present a semblance of a pattern - enough that it can pull away a lot of your thinking and sort of drown it in a black hole - liberating the other part of your brain for whatever daydreaming you feel like.

I think that's why so many people really like to listen to *This is Folk Music* to go to bed - you know, it's dream-inducing… which I think is really healthy. *Hungry Ghosts* isn't like that - its subtitle is 'These songs are doors' - and I worked pretty hard to make sure it really felt like that, like you were being led on a vision of some kind - like Dante moving through different circles of Hell - sort of passing out periodically and the suddenly being woken up somewhere else. You know actually a huge influence on me was that FM Einheit / Andres Ahmmer record *Radio Inferno* which is brilliant - I mean really genius. It's all sound collage and John Peel narrating. Amazing.

EP Hypnosis – there's a fascinating subject. Some agree on the theory that hypnosis can unlock hidden memories, captured by the brain in tape-recorder mode, sometimes without even knowing it.

MUDBOY This is a very controversial subject - and from what I understand, most serious hypnotists are very reluctant to use hypnosis for long term memory retrieval - it is probably the least predictable use of hypnosis. The heightened suggestibility of patients can

easily offset any memory recall, though like another myth 'amnesia' it makes for good plot twists on TV. But on the other hand I believe deeply that our brains absorb huge amounts of information that is sort of locked away, or buried - and that the amount of that information borders on omniscience. Practising intuitive decision-making is probably the best way to access that information. I think being in a hypnotic state on a general basis probably makes access to that information easier on a day to day basis - but I am not sure if it is useful to be in a hypnotic trance at the time it comes out. If anything I think it's like you go to sleep and when you wake up suddenly you remember where you left your keys, or that dude's name who stole your homework in third grade.

EP You seem to say that hypnotic states are more common than we realise, which is very plausible, but what happens to us in those states? Can we bring anything worthwhile or productive out of it?

MUDBOY Well, This I am not sure about- I am convinced that inducing hypnotic states of mind, and daydreaming is fundamentally a healthy activity and is very good for people - it's good for their bodies and mind in the way that any kind of relaxation is - but I think that the free association that can happen as we drift off, I do think that it opens us up to all kind of creative activities and can unlock certain thoughts and memories that aren't easy to get at.

EP Have childhood traumas or buried memories ever played a part in forming the maelstrom of information and experience that is the raw material of your art…and by what means have you managed to process them?

MUDBOY Well - I don't know, I think I'm what they call a sensitive - sometimes more than others. When I started playing live shows - it really was a leaning experience because I could just feel the sort of motion of power or energy in the room when it was focused - it's pretty crazy - and I'm not the best performer in the world. I don't have the raw juice someone like say Quintron has - he can power through stuff on his raw charisma. I can't get away with that but I can feel it in the room when things are going right, and it's like you don't have to go in there like a football player - you can treat it more as a matter of leverage - just the right pressure in the right place. I learned a lot from Irene Moon - who you know, is probably the most amazing 'noise' artist - but is so far out that the genre can't handle her. She's been doing the most freaked-out weird shit for so long - like Powerpoint presentations about the life of ants with maggot videos and drone music behind. No one ever is ready for her show - so she has to completely command the room when she starts or it's all lost. That's why it's so much like spell-casting - you either run the show or you don't. There is a circle of power you control and in that line is the world you are bringing people - there is no

grey area, it's in or out.

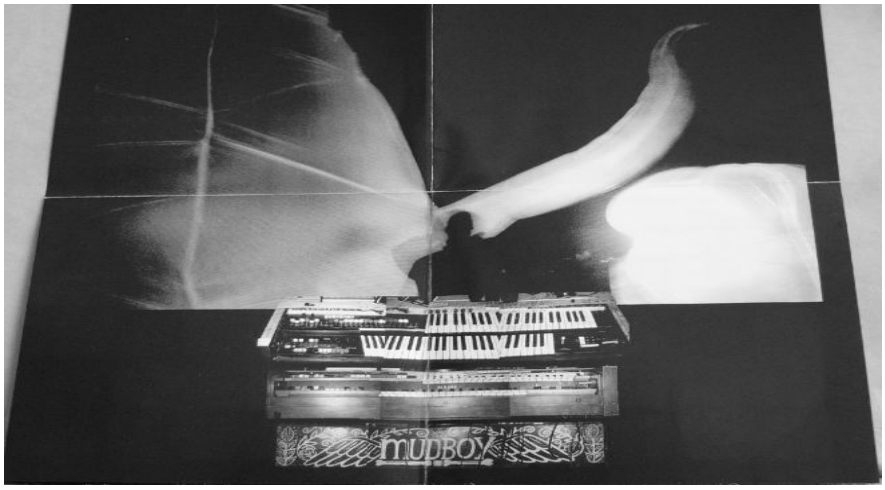
EP Would it be possible to learn more about your radio play *Psicklops*…and perhaps any fall-out resulting from its broadcast? Were not listeners put in fear of their mortal souls? Was it a cataclysmic event to rank with Orson Welles and his War of the Worlds?

MUDBOY *Psicklops* is well - I think it's a big deal, I am a big fan of old radio theater - but have always felt that somewhat like analog electronic instruments its natural lifespan as an art form was truncated - in the case of analog - by digital instrumentation and in the case of narrative radio - by television. What we have now is Audio Theater, which hasn't progressed much beyond its six-word structural vocabulary (end scene, cue incidental music, begin narration 'I heard a dog bark'- cue bark etc ...) and 'sound art' which tends to be really afraid of any cinematic vocabulary. *Psicklops* was an attempt, hopefully one among many, that treats the audio landscape as having the same potential for cinematic coding as film - a different series of codes but nevertheless capable of the same depth in relation to perspective, 'point of view' background, mid-ground and foreground elements etc... the challenge is that of course in film - everything is coded by the camera - and through it the illusion of seeing what the characters see. It is possible to show someone looking and then what they are looking at - it is a very difficult thing to hear someone listening.....

There is a tie in with the mudboy stuff though - both projects are built around trance induction - *Psicklops* more overtly since there is a lot of interrogatory situations (it's loosely based on *The Trial* but mudboy increasingly is moving to downright hypnosis, drone and spell casting. You can hear the beginnings of that in *This is Folk Music* and the live CD-R (which has a funny video if you put it in your computer) you can hear firecrackers as part of the instrument ensemble... I use a lot of homemade light props and burn sage and walk around the room with bells – a smoke machine... it's pretty freaky.

It's a pretty important project for me - I feel like experimental audio narrative has a lot of room to grow - and there are really only a handful of people in the world even messing with it. It's just not stylish - everyone wants to make videos for YouTube, I don't know. I tried to write something for this sound art book *bhgaht* but then I got tired. I'll attach the draft - there is some good thoughts in there you can pull from. It's not totally coherent but you'll get the vibe.

EP I found *Psicklops* extremely compelling to listen to. The interesting thing is that the content deals with fairly familiar subjects - for example corporate business, advertising, the banality of television, toxic products, the inane pretensions of rock stars... But the method used here is anything but commonplace. I mean it's a very unusual assemblage and the information spools out in a strange trajectory, full of oblique patterns and hidden levels. In particular I like the disorienting sensation, such that the listener doesn't really know where they are; and the subtle use of repetitions. How much effort did you put into ordering, arranging and editing the material? Is there anything deliberate about the structure, or is it more random? How did you know when it was finished?

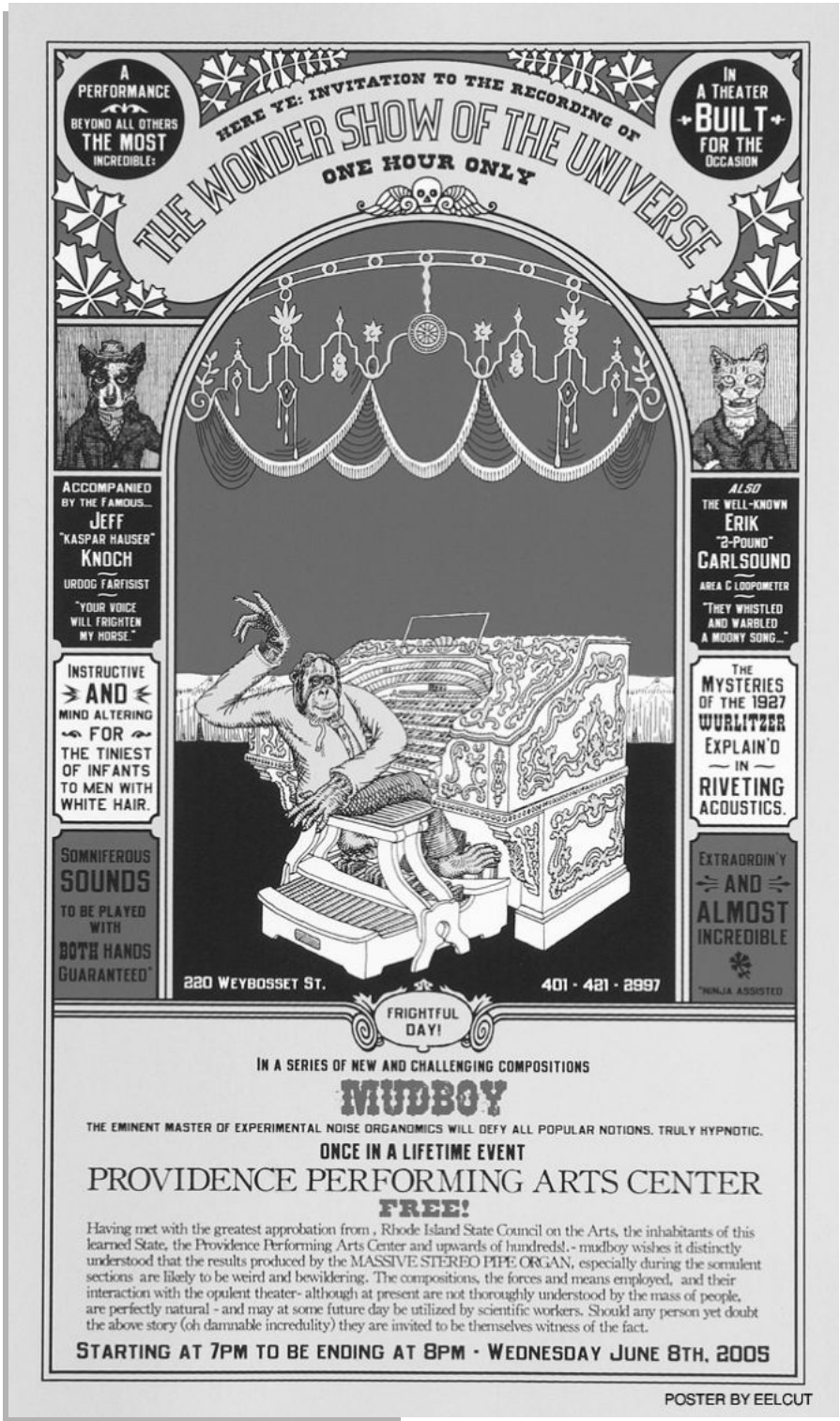


MUDBOY Well - I work backwards, like a sculptor or a film documentarian- (I actually am a film documentarian hah!..www.ithefilm.com...) but anyway – I collect sounds on instinct moving toward a theme. Sometimes I get really great stuff and I start to imagine a loose narrative or at least themes around that subject... So some of the recordings like that guy doing 'Slanarchy' (this is actually Ron Rege of cartoon fame, also plays with Lavender Diamond). Anyway - so he is drunk at a new years party reading some crazy sign he found. I have that recording and it's unbelievably real – so I work backwards...imagining a recontextualization... He's not a drunk dude at a party, he is an undercover corporate operator subconsciously selling a marketing jingle at a party. Then I record the backstory to make that work. But I record Jo Frank style- it's a lot of improvisation with heavy editing. The result I think is a very blurry line between the texture of recorded and scripted events and a sort of impossible field recording.

I think structurally if you listen to the whole piece, it is a little more consciously crafted than it might first appear. There are three interwoven and related story lines - one of which is the interrogation of the Argentine who was involved in a Krishna Disco band. (which you hear at the end of the piece- that's real Krishna disco I found). The people interrogating him sort of represent the dumb cop duo that figure heavily in Kafka's 'The Trial'. Anyway - one of them is me, who you hear later in the car picking up the guitar player (one scene) and then later dropping him off at the ad agency (another scene). There you see him and a deep voice fellow (Jim Drain who also did the cover art and was part of Force Field). They come up with this loyalty jingle 'Pledge your head'. Those are the main characters and plot lines. In between this is a first person interrogation of the listener - which is very important as it frames the rest of the scenes as potentially a series of flashbacks, or memories, or confessions. Hence the repeated 'Who are you' as a break between scenes.

The 'who are you' is something of a flaw in the piece, because it is the only time you break frame - the voices are disembodied and aren't located in any real space - which I think, along the lines of the cinematic vocabulary I am trying to build with *Psicklops*, is an error. It's like having a sudden voice over in a film and not knowing who or what it is. One thing that was cool about *Psicklops* is that I would send it to anyone who wanted to host a screening of it in their house, or gallery or whatever. I sent the CD and posters for free. Places where people don't speak English very much.

EP Which of these fictional characters most resembles mudboy in his performative mode: Captain Nemo, The Phantom of the Opera, or Dick Sprang's Batman? Which character traits from these (and any other) social outcasts have been woven into your own persona?



POSTER BY EELCUT

MUDBOY I don't know this stuff. I like Pirates. I like the experience of listening to words in another language.

EP What other collaborators or artistes do you see fit to represent on your record label? What kind of material are you looking for?

MUDBOY Well fm4tb [Free Matter For The Blind] … You know, it's not really a music label - it's for non-music recordings, but I think there is so much rad stuff being made I try and limit myself to special things - it's like say there was an amazing radio station that would just play only things you can't believe you are even listening to - you feel lucky it was recorded. That's what I want. That's what I want to put out. I also want to clone myself to do the work. But experimental narrative sound art is something I am always excited about. Stuff you want to listen to as you sew a crazy monster doll for your niece.

EP I see at least one release of yours comes with a comic book. As a comic artist myself, I'd love to hear of your experience in that area, especially the recent upsurge in the US small-press…do you draw /

write yourself? What do you think of the sort of work in *Kramer's Ergot*? Ever go to MOCCA in NYC? Any artists you admire, or otherwise?

MUDBOY Jeez this is a big question, not to mention I'm friends with half the people in that book. I don't know- its all about DIY, photocopiers, CD burners, whatever. Culture you know - not art. That's where it's at.

EP Have you met or performed with Lightning Bolt?…I suppose they're real big shots now, yet only a few hundred cognoscenti went to see them in London last year.

MUDBOY I have lived with both those Brians, Brian C at Fort Thunder and Brian G before that across the street. So I know them pretty well - I have played some shows with them, not a lot, when they play in town it's usually for some touring act they want to support, and you know - they are pretty much into a lot louder stuff then me. When people go to their shows the audience wants to drink beer and freak out. I'm more psyched when everyone sits down and falls asleep. But I did a month with Wizzards, which is Brian Gibson and Rich Porter's new project, and I have been friends with them both for years, but it was the first time we went on tour together so it was a lot of fun.

EP Have you heard the recently reissued Alan Sondheim record, recorded in Providence in 1968? Is he still alive or still there? Have you ever taken him for a guiding light, inspiration-wise?

MUDBOY Name sounds familiar - I'm pretty uneducated about music when it comes down to it - I feel like it's all serendipity for me. Someone lends me a record and if I like it, I'll listen to it for like a month straight. I get really freaked out by iPods and people with instant access to any album they want at a moment's notice. It's just not they way I like to listen to stuff - I want it to ask for me, not the other way around. □

mudboy discography

mudboy volumes I-II ("mostly unreleased Raymond Scott kind of stuff") (ND)

mudboy + Tomy Organism: A preliminary sampler
CDR 50 minutes (2004)

mudboy volume III: *Resnik Loves Me* or *Further Adventures in Space, Time, Math, and Other Inconsistencies*
CDR 60 minutes (2001)

mudboy *Live at the Safari*
CDR 33 minutes (2004)
Re-released by Retina Scan (Germany)

The Invisible Pyramid: Elegy Box
Last Visible Dog 6-CD box set compilation (2005)
mudboy contributes one track

mudboy volume IV: *This Is Folk Music*
Last Visible Dog CD, 47 minutes (2005)

mudboy volume V: *Hungry Ghosts* (not released)

mudboy and Orphan Fairytale
Bread and Animals

mudboy volume VI: *Let It Be A Nightingale Then / Whose Words Are My Words*
Belgium Imvated vinyl only LP- edition of 300 (2006)

Free Matter for the Blind

Free Matter for the blind: 6 CD series Audio Zine (2005)

Thee Haunted Cobblestones Sunset Concert Series: 10 part series (2005)

Psicklops: radio play (2005)

Films

CP Rail Kanada (collection of shorts) (ND)

Eye of the Storm (pre-2005)

i (2006)

http://mudboymusic.com/
www.freematterfortheblind.com
www.ithefilm.com

Extract from Piggy Play by Raphael Lyon

I'm standing outside a small vinyl-sided house in suburban Western Massachusetts. The leaves next door haven't been raked in forever and somewhere nearby a decaying 1973 Chevrolet is just waiting to be fixed. It's not the most obvious place for the home of a woman who has spent the last few years trying to morph Alf and Miss Piggy. Or maybe it is. Jessica Ciocci is probably the most self-effacing and reclusive member of the three person group Paper Rad - the sometimes band, sometimes comic and video collective, always website and installation posse. Stepping inside the innocuous looking home she shares with her work and life partner Ben Jones, I'm greeted with an explosion of spray paint cat prints, dolls, spaceships and Slinkie...

U W OWL

EP It's a pleasure to hear some real 'hand-made' electronic music in the welter of processed laptop music that's been plaguing me for the last 5 years. How did you arrive at your back-to-basics set up? What personal sacrifices were involved?

JONAS From the beginning we have always been into gear. So having something physical in front of you feels only natural. With a laptop I'm not sure you could have the same feeling, I've never tried it though. With synthesizers in general, both digital and analog, there is a lot of thought involved, and you can't get away with things as easily. Understanding synthesis is very important to us, we never intended to be the types who just plug in and start turning some knobs. I'm not sure if we used laptops we would still be concerned with these principles as much. It seems like laptops are full of shortcuts. The only real sacrifice I can think of is the cost of all of this. We have gone through so many gear changes trying to find the right thing that works, it can become expensive.

JOCHEN Going with all dedicated hardware was really no sacrifice, rather a way to satisfy our thirst for accumulating more and more electronics gear and synthesizers. Sonically some things might have been easier to produce using a laptop or maybe might have been more 'controllable'. But for us everything is about the live-experience and about improvisation, so in a way having all hardware makes things a little bit easier to control. Physical knobs and cables keep things more visceral and allow you to have something to hang on to while you're getting lost in the sound. Also during that time, U W OWL worked and lived in a dirty basement (see pictures) and would practice at max volume through multiple PA systems to rattle the primordial dust. As Jonas used to put it: 'It's like we're making earth down here' ... But the main drawback was playing out because you have to end up moving so much stuff, which is why shows is something we don't do too often, as they are kind of a big deal for us.

U W OWL are a duo of American electronic primitive noise-merchants, **Jonas Asher** and **Jochen Hartmann**. Their debut LP (reviewed in the US Underground Vinyl section) is worth investigating while you can still find a copy. Here, they reveal to The Sound Projector that their music "basically summons the undead".

EP From sleeve art, I'll hazard a guess that you're interested in (a) spirit photography, ectoplasms, and ghosts; and (b) alchemical symbolism, and the occult. Am I right? What influence do these unseen and unknown things have on your music?

JONAS These are definitely things that have had an influence over us. I can remember that we had actually spray painted a giant pentagram on the floor of the basement we practised in, and then covered it up with a bunch of rugs we found on the street. Playing down there we always tried to summon something, and sometimes it worked. It was weird down there, the place definitely had its history. Before we lived there, supposedly the Guatemalan Mafia used to have dog fights. And it wouldn't surprise me if someone had been murdered down there. It was a dark place. So I think the artwork had to reflect that same feeling, it had to be something related to the way the place made you feel.

JOCHEN I agree: our music basically summons the un-dead. It's about unexplainable things, the past, death, decay and abandon; recurring themes that we both have a penchant for. Maybe its because they are unexplainable and maybe it's because of our process of improvising: in a way after the session is over you are just left with a document - a sonic 'corpse' in the form of a recording.

EP Seems you've been around for a few years before this vinyl LP came out. What were you doing before then? Tell me more about the production of the LP. It's a real art object!

JONAS Before UW OWL, Jochen was part of a group called **Seewolf**, which I also started playing in towards the end of its existence. After Seewolf was over we just kept playing together. And for about 3 years it was almost every weekend, jamming in our basement in Bushwick - Brooklyn, NY. I think this area of NY was a big part of UW OWL. It is a very isolated, desolate, industrial area of Brooklyn. It was hard to leave our basement, so in the cold winter months especially, we would just confine ourselves to our basement and try and understand as much about our instruments as possible. More than anything the 'Thorn Elemental' days were a time for really trying to understand and study

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analog and digital synthesis. It was a bit of an obsession. As for the production of the LP: the jacket itself is a die cut jacket that was cut on a Vandercook Universal 3 proof press. These are typically used for letterpress printing. After they were all die cut we glued and folded them all together. The image on the record is a letterpress print I did of a photo that was taken during one of the recordings in our basement. This was then glued to the inner window of the black jacket. From the beginning it was a bit of an experiment. I had never die cut such a large object as a LP jacket, so I wasn't sure how it would turn out. We wanted something substantial to the packaging, and something special, not just something typical, we wanted their to be a sense of craft involved. I think the result is very satisfying, and turned out for the most part how we intended it to, and has been a kind of a symbol of quality that we want to be evident in all **Phaserprone** releases.

Jochen: U W OWL formed after Seewolf sort of stopped. I was in Seewolf with Greg, a close friend. Eventually I met Jonas and the three of us started playing together. Then Greg moved to Philadelphia and so Jonas and I continued as U W OWL. The record is really a culmination of three years' worth of recordings and playing some shows. We had both been very critical of our own work and took quite a while in analyzing our work and picking out tracks. I edited all of these tracks myself which was also quite a task. But on the whole I think we actually tended to stay a little bit more conservative on this record in terms of the stuff we actually released. We do have some other releases planned in the future that will feature some of the more 'out there' material. We are also planning to release the complete Seewolf discography hopefully before the end of this year. This will be in the form of two 4 CD box sets; it will be *epic* both in terms of sound and production! Also Jonas plays solo as **Grasslung**, and I play solo as **HsDOM**, we both have releases on Phaserprone. □

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October 2006
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BALTIMORE, MD

ENVIRONMENT and FIELD RECORDINGS

Drift over the Horizon on a feather bed

Coleclough & murmer
Husk
UK ICR DISTRIBUTION ICR57 2 x CD (2006)

Excellent tour de force by these two significant sound artists, the first fruits of a collaboration that began when they first met in 2002. In places *Husk* achieves a level of satisfactoriness that is almost impossible to credit…murmer is Patrick McGinley, an expatriate American living in the UK, whom we interviewed in issue 13. For years he's been steeped in the universe of field recordings, plugging directly into a network of like-minded environmental sound-gatherers across the globe, hosting a radio show 'Framework' themed on said subject, and bringing his background in theatre and sound-design to his recorded projects. Englishman Jonathan Coleclough I'm familiar with mainly from his issued work on the Anomalous Records label, but he's a bit more reclusive and mysterious. He too has worked a lot with field recordings, but also unusual and imaginative 'instrumentation' in his musical productions, such as the time he appeared to be 'playing' a set of cast-iron railings. He has also been drawn to computer-based reprocessing and layering of sound recordings, not so as to lose himself in a morass of digital process, but in order to bring out hidden, mystical dimensions from the world around us, coded messages concealed in sound. Both these men then are blessed with a visionary touch in their field which leaves a lot of their contemporaries standing. The nearest counterpart to the joint work on this set might be that of the Americans mnortham, jgrzinich and Seth Nehil, who frequently tend to surrender a lot of the definition they capture in the diffuseness of their finished products. By contrast, Coleclough and murmer are all about deep-focus, razor-sharp, high-definition 'photography' in sound.

There's plenty of evidence for that technical accomplishment on these two discs, even if we can't claim that every moment of it resonates with solid genius. But listen to the 20-minute opener 'wend', a subtle panoramic sound-art portrait of the world, and it shows their deliberation, their careful selection of sounds; this strong-minded discrimination is one of their chief strengths. 'wend' is a layered, compacted sandwich of sound, mostly abstracted, but with some recognisable elements (vivid seaside recordings in the middle, for example) that are breathtaking. The remainder is pure craft; each sound burnished to perfection. Slow, droney, perhaps even 'uneventful' by conventional standards, 'wend' remains completely compelling. It presents a sound-world so polished, so carefully constructed, that it gives off a sheen of almost impossible perfection.

The second track on disc one, 'freon', likewise captures the air, the sand and the sea, in a super-imposed triple-exposure sound picture. Watery sounds, droning, percussive notes, filters, and full control over what I presume must be many hours of compressed and edited sound-captures. The best 'ambient' sound-scaping I've ever heard (indeed it gives new meaning to that 1990s genre). The volume of material may be testament to hours of time simply spent listening; the evidence on disc represents selection of those moments packed with the most energy, the elusive qualities of nature they are looking for. Coleclough emerges as a meditational holy man in this regard, and McGinley is equipped with ultra-sensitive organs of hearing and a brainload of ideas too.

Disc two proposes a single escapade divided into three long suites. 30 intense minutes make for another strong opener; this potent drug for the mind offers a slow descent into the depths, with the pressure gradually increasing until your head feels like it's about to explode. This episode is punctuated with percussive bell sounds which contribute some relief, but mostly it's a slowly-tightening vice fitted to your brain. The profound metaphysical explorations continue, leading you out of the other side of the ocean floor to enter a windy valley. These open-ended abstractions convey a sense of sacred place with their serene humming.

Then comes a mesmerising processed drone-and-throb piece, with a metallic lion purring in the foreground. Again, the work done by our two explorers is nigh-on seamless, no rough edges in the finished results and an almost-pristine digital cleanness. This episode develops into a slightly less intense zone of concentration, suggestive of wildlife and alien environments. It's a pleasure to have a CD you feel you could roam around inside, like your own private safari park.

The suite proceeds with twenty minutes which are positively 'eventful' after the preceding minimal excursions, as we drift through rainstorms, water

pools, sheets of glass, and distant music wafts in from unknown corners of the imaginary space. As you traverse these suspended layers, it's like taking part in a cinematic dream where images, characters and scenes slowly come in and out of focus, forming infinite narrative possibilities. Then comes track four and the final 20 minutes, allowing us to drift over the horizon on a feather bed drawn by gently lapping tides. The entire work is riddled with this uncanny mutating structure, constantly creating these gradual and organic shifts in tone, mood, texture and shape. Rather than inflicting yet another episode of processed noise into an already over-cluttered market, the creators have clearly thought long and hard about every minute on this two-hour set; here be true electro-acoustic genius. If they ever make a record with Michael Prime, then look out world!

ED PINSENT 23/08/2006

www.minya98.freeserve.co.uk
www.murmerings.com
colinpotter@another.com
www.icrdistribution.com

K K Null / Chris Watson / Z'ev

Number One
UK TOUCH TONE 24 CD (2005)

Brilliant and exciting unusual project this. What happens when Watson combines his now-famous field recordings of animal and insect life with passages of strange electronic music from K K Null and the thundering rhythmical backdrops of Z'ev. Gotta confess that initially, I had some qualms that this was some sort of a contrivance, bringing together various 'big names' in the avant-world to work together which smacked of the sort of self-indulgence we used to find in the progressive rock scene. Z'ev's recent record with Organum, also on this label, springs to mind as an example. Well, I am completely wrong in this case. Why, these three geniuses might have been born to work together!

The results of their collaboration? Five tracks of the most alien sounds you will ever hear committed to tape. Each contribution sits together in perfect suspended tension, no single element overpowering another. The sounds of wildlife and nature, birds, insects, animals and more besides and framed and reframed in a brilliantly bizarre and wonderful re-contextualising, filled with drama and import, mystery and tension. The combination of Null's live electronics with genuine bird calls, for example, produces an intensity and curiosity along the lines of Oscar Sala's soundtrack work for *The Birds* by Alfred Hitchcock. As you remember, there isn't a single natural bird sound on that entire movie; it's all produced to order by electronic means. Need more evidence, more power? Well, there are some overwhelming weather recordings on track 4, bringing excitement and danger to your racing heart, bolstered by cataclysmic musical accompaniments exploding in sympathy. On track 5, some typically brutalist Z'ev percussion work is in evidence, while various creatures caw, hoot and honk in time with his beats. This record could easily restore your missing sense of awe at the cosmos and the natural world; it's practically a force of nature in itself.

All five of Watson's 'location sounds', gathered from East Africa, are described in terse prose paragraphs (although without the usual attention to dates and recording details we usually associate with Watson's work); track two apparently features vultures feeding, track three an elephant herd, track four an oncoming storm and wind rush, with a 'low infrasonic hum'. Null's 'electronic and electro-percussions' were all produced in January 2004; same goes for Z'ev's 'binary-acoustic' files. (I have no idea what a binary-acoustic file may be). Over four days in the following March, Z'ev also completed the editing, assemblage and final mix of all the contributions, and kept a log of all his work on his website rhythmmajik.com. As if all this wasn't enough, there's yet a further dimension: the five stages of the CD are structured in accordance with a Noh cycle of plays. Part two, for example, corresponds with man the warrior, and a brief haiku-like description of its content runs 'mars speech fire south summer morning'. There's enough information here to keep you decoding for months...

In constructing this space-bound Noah's Ark for the 21st century, Japanese guitar-wielding and rhythm-hungry wildman K K Null have supplied the propulsion units for the rocket, while American hammering percussionist and ear-ringed Egyptian reincarnate Z'ev built the titanium hull of it. Englishman Chris Watson, friend of beast and fowl, naturally is the herdsman who brings the animal population on board. Climb on, sailors of the avant ocean!

ED PINSENT 24/07/2006

www.touchmusic.org.uk

Chris Watson / B J Nilsen

Storm
UK TOUCH TONE 27 CD (2006)

Storm is the fruit of a long-haul collaboration between this pair of sound artists, and based on their mutual love of the music of the sea and the elements. They decided to do it after a meeting in 2000, patiently spending time working in isolation to gather the required raw materials; the collaborative part seems to have happened at the eleventh hour, at the mixing desk of a computer. Watson opens the collection with 'No Man's Land', a compressed and edited set of field recordings he made over a five-year period in North-East England and Scotland. We hear the enchanting sounds of the sea and the wind, along with wildlife recordings of seals and gulls, sometimes overlaid into naturalist symphonies. Only a man of stone could fail to be stirred by the beauty and grandeur of these vivid sounds, even if this work is fairly 'ordinary' compared to the other astonishing recordings Watson has issued under his name. (In case you still don't have 2003's *Weather Report*, secure a copy immediately).

Watson and Nilsen collaborate on 'SIGWX', the second track, and a very good synthesis of ideas and material it is too. The 'raw' Watson recordings of seals and weather effects rub up against the slightly more processed drone-scapes of Nilsen. A damp and muffled experience results, like being lost in an open sea in a small rowboat, during a thick fog. The blurb alongside this on the sleeve reiterates phrases from Radio Four's shipping forecast, a radio broadcast which holds a special place in the heart of many English listeners; some regard it as a form of radiophonic concrete poetry. This 'SIGWX' also contains some of the most beautiful rainfall recordings

I've ever heard, and that's saying something given how often that particular documentary source is so often overused. The third track is solo Nilsen, called 'Austrvegr', and shows further faces of the cruel sea, with oceanic and storm recordings which often make you feel you're experiencing a dream-like, privileged view of the world and the elements, floating and flying across the surface of the sea. What wonders this duo cannot achieve with their binaural mics. A lovely, lyrical release!

ED PINSENT 16/11/2006

www.touchmusic.org.uk

Werner Durand and Alio Die

Aqua Planing

ITALY HIC SUNT LEONES HSL 029 CD (2005)

Excellent record combining interesting and unusual field recordings with droney and scrapey improv, which is always a winning formula. Durand is the German experimenter whom we last heard making humming bee-like noises with his plastic tubes on *The Art of Buzzing (Excuse the Delay)*, whilst wearing a black-and-yellow stripey jumper. Here, he plays a Persian ney, a clarinet, a Khen and a Shakuhachi flute, while Alio Die (ie the Italian environmental recordist Stefano Musso) contributes playback of field recordings made in Thailand and Italy. Finished results are beautiful, everything coming out airy and spacey. 'Luftspiegelungen' – literally, a 'mirroring of the air' – conveys the sense of an eerie swamp filled with insects, while 'Night Train to Bangkok' stirs the traveller's bones with its sounds of slow-moving railway shunts. By the time of 'Aqua Planing' it's fairly clear that each artiste is doing at least two or three things by way of overdubbing, and we have a soaring watery drone of delight. The 12-minute 'La Grotta nella Valle Dimenticata' is stunningly beautiful, a heady mix of church bells, water sounds, and general mystical ambience from a sacred or secret location, an emotional bond which has somehow been captured onto tape in a way Chris Watson would approve. This track adds a genuinely metaphysical dimension to the CD, an exploration of time, space and memory, but the wonderful 'Ghost' track is equally profound. This release has a fairly wishy-washy cover, but it's a fantastic piece of sound art.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2006

www.aliodie.com

Yannick Dauby

TW04-05

FRANCE ÉDITIONS ERE è®e NO NUMBER CD (2006)

Field recordings made in Taiwan by Dauby. All is described in a handy capsuled profile; collection is summarised as comprising urban and rural recordings, people and animal sounds, insects, weather, 'acoustic movements and sonic ambiences'. I envy the man who has the kind of life that permits him to keep still long enough to even detect such things as 'acoustic movements and sonic ambiences' taking place around him, let alone find the technical means to capture them on digital storage media. Yet that is exactly what Dauby has done. On the sleeve, his personal gratitude is extended to lots of people (mostly families in that part of the East, in whose homes he may have installed himself), but on evidence available on this disc he evinces little interest in people as human beings, but rather as some sort of walking sound-generators - their acoustical properties are what interest him. Their laughter or speech in particular, and in the latter instance he doesn't appear to care what they are saying, concentrating simply on the sound they make. A child's babbling is to him every bit as interesting as the roar of a passing motorbike, the progress of a rainstorm, or the exotic chirping of insects. An intensely beautiful record results. One reason it works so well is the compression of two years' worth of work into an hour, 35 short tracks, little picture postcards, edited and put together in a pleasing mosaic-like sequence. From this evidence, I would say that Taiwan is clearly a land of many contrasts. Unlike say Mark Gergis or Alan Bishop, who (on their Sublime Frequencies releases) wish to portray the Far East as somehow alien and threatening to the Western mind-set, Dauby simply beholds a serene beauty in the natural forms he finds there.

ED PINSENT 25/07/2006

www.editions-ere.net
www.kalerne.net

Various

Incidental Amplifications

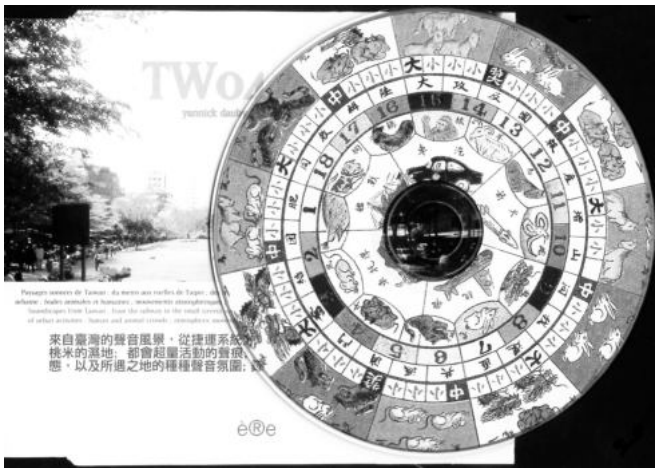
AUSTRALIA ROOM 40 EDRM405 CD (2006)

Environmental-ish recordings; a compilation of 14 cuts derived from 'A spatial sound installation installed in a variety of urban shopping areas and malls across Brisbane', said work being curated by Lawrence English (who's been on one of those Australian Naturesound CDs) and Lloyd Barrett. Among the 'big name' contributors we find Watson, Labelle, Sciajno and Thaemlitz. I was very interested to read about this installation idea. Unfortunately, for the most part, this record is just totally dull, dry, minimal rattling – plenty of unobtrusive, droning, clicking and clacking field recordings that verge on being inert Polaroids of banal modernist architecture. Maybe this is the point the curators were trying to make, but speaking as one who despises shopping malls with a vengeance, I'd personally like to have seen some more criticism, some sign that these creators oppose or object to that banality, and are not simply settling for passive acceptance of these empty monuments to consumerism.

Admittedly, there are some exceptions. Terre Thaemlitz is saying something faintly disparaging about the ubiquitous piped music in malls in his 'Millennial Muzak'; I share that view, and often find it odd that violent, misogynist hip-hop music is often considered a fit soundtrack for what is normally deemed a 'family' experience. Aaron Ximm does a witty subversion of babbling sales-people in his 'Sales_Pitch_Phase', garbling their vacuous patter into complete nonsense with his clever loops. And Daniel Blinkhorn manages to get slightly more agitated than the other contributors with his very pro-active treatments of odd found sounds, including water and creaking; he somehow finds mystery and poetry in the mall environment, which takes some doing. He's about the only one here (except Chris Watson) to bring the hoped-for site-specific and psycho-geographic dimension to this enterprise. Remainder of disc is otherwise rather flat, and fails to transcend its source material.

ED PINSENT 23/07/2006

www.room40.org



IN THE ART GALLERY

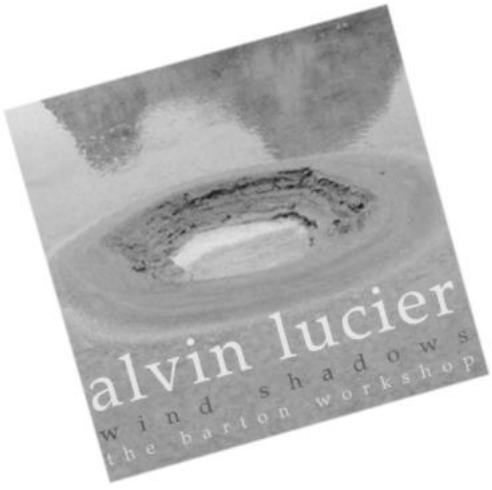
Modernist Music and Composers

Alvin Lucier

Wind Shadows
USA NEW WORLD RECORDS
80628-2 2 x CD (2005)

Strong collection of later compositional works by this US experimenter, the stuttering genius who gave us *Bird and Person Dyning* and *I Am Sitting in a Room*. Deathless classics both. Here he shows his talents for scoring minimal modernist works for small ensembles; excitingly, many of the pieces combine acoustic instruments with electronic wave oscillators. These latter works get my ribcage humming with approval, with their pleasing combination of sonic effects from acoustic and electronic sources, and also because they drone on for a very long time without changing much. Much as I like this collection, it's fair to say you get very little variation over the two discs; if it's avant-monotony you want, this set is for you. 'In Memoriam Stuart Marshall' and 'In Memoriam John Higgins' both use a single clarinet playing against an oscillator; gorgeously empty drones result in both cases. 1992's 'Letters' is a six-minute gem which doesn't drone, but uses violin and cello to make daring swooping patterns not unlike a Morton Feldman miniature. '40 rooms' is the work of a small quintet playing disjointed and dissonant plucks in typically modernist fashion, the thin sound bolstered by a digital reverb system.

That's all on disc one; second disc has three more pieces enriched with oscillator activity. 'Q' is from 1996 and is highly effective – a quintet of strings, horns and woodwind setting up a monolithic block of lard-like whiteness, against which a slightly-detuning oscillator hums like the old man of the mountains. Staying in tune has never been a strong feature of an analogue synthesizer, but here it becomes a virtue. This work, and 1987's 'Fideliotria', compare favourably with Phill Niblock – it's like being punched in the face in slow motion. The latter uses viola, cello and piano alone to build a 12-minute wall of painfully minimal monotony.



'A tribute to James Tenney' is almost bleak in its melancholy simplicity – a five-part work for just one double bass and yet more of those oscillators. Rather than a stringed instrument, the bass sounds more like blasts from a sad trumpet. The programme ends with 'Wind Shadows', 19 minutes of music from trombone and oscillators, creating an equally chilling portrait of desolation and loneliness, suggestive of emotional attrition and a man's attenuated desires blowing away in the indifferent winds of life.

James Fulkerson has been a key figure in realising this project, directing the Barton workshop. Fans of Lucier's earlier and more radical music, or his recordings for Lovely Music, may find this set slightly more formalist, but no less rewarding.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2006

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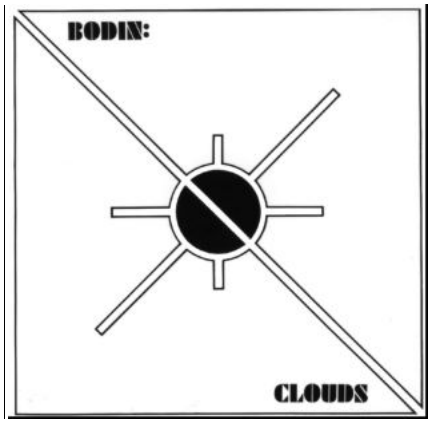
Hugh Davies

Tapestries - Five Electronic Pieces
ITALY ANTS AG04 CD (2005)

Strong survey of electro-acoustic work by Hugh Seymour Davies, this extraordinary fellow, one of the UK's true originals and mavericks of wayward genius who sadly died in 2005. Along with this Italian release and 2001's *Warming up with The Iceman* on German label GROB, I'm forever finding evidence that we in the UK tend to neglect our own home-grown musicians like nobody else, and although this release isn't the 6-CD box set a man of his stature deserves (in my book), it goes a long way to putting things right. Also I personally regret not reviewing the book/CD package called *Sounds Heard*, sent to me personally by Davies, before he died. That particular item concentrated on his hand-made, clunky, Heath-Robinson styled musical instruments, and also on his strategies and suggestions for how and where to find / make music in the most unlikely settings, even including crossing the road at a pelican crossing (a true connoisseur, Davies could pinpoint and describe the different sonic qualities of automated crossing systems all across Europe!). By contrast, what we have on this disc is largely full-blown studio compositional and electroacoustic works, five examples of such, dating 1976-2000. This, and indeed any example of Davies' work, ought to be required listening for any young upstart with a Celeron-powered microcomputer who thinks he knows all there is to know about electronic music.

'Vision' is a personal favourite of mine on this collection, as it gets about the most agitated on an otherwise serene and calming collection. From 1984-87, it was realised with the help of the Fairlight computer at Goldsmiths College in London, and part of the finished piece was used for a dance/theatre work. It involves a complex series of micro and macrotonal tunings which will amaze your ears with its unfamiliar combinations. For more of the same, tune into 'Celeritas' which opens the CD, a work which uses similar methodology and the same instrument. There's also 'Tapestries' from 1982, mostly derived from sound processing and synthesisers, and intended as a homage to the powers of nature – growth and decay being two prevalent themes, though I also have the impression of several airy, spacey passages depicting the sky and the wind.

'Natural Images' is also a portrait of nature, but is much more rugged and complicated. From 1976, another work used in a dance context, it is a very direct tribute to animal life, plant life, and organic growth of cells in these living organisms. It arrives



at this point through sheer sonic poetry. Davies began by recording sounds from very humble domestic sources, things he found around his own house – including the breadbin in his kitchen, and a squeaker on a toy rubber doll. Through 'classic' musique concrète methods, these recordings were transmuted into the rich variety of what you hear, but with the creator's strong intention throughout that they correspond to the sounds of whales, wolves, birds, and other natural things. Lyrical, fascinating, and a testament to the unique shape of Davies' mind.

Add to this a cover artwork by Hugh and Rebecca Davies, and an 8-page booklet with descriptive notes for each track, a history of Davies, and very good personal tributes by his friend David Toop, and you have pretty much an irresistible package.

ED PINSENT 16/10/2006

www.silenzio-distribuzione.it/ants.htm

Lars-Gunnar Bodin

Clouds

SWEDEN FYLKINGEN RECORDS FYCD 1023 CD (2005)

Good vintage (1972-1976) for this example of prime Swedish electro-acoustic, musical theatre and poetry recording; but overall it's pretty solemn, dreary and boring, despite its flashes of garbled genius and lyrical flourishes. What you hear is three songstresses (with ranges from soprano to mezzo-soprano) and another couple of narrating voices, all throwing their combined larynxes into the ring; plus electronic music composed by Bodin, and his artistic treatments of the voice elements, all resulting in a lengthy and mysterious soundscape with a story. It has brief flurries of excitement. But there's also a classical-ish 'opera' tone, traces of the conservatoire, which bores me – as does the sluggish pace of it. *Clouds* was originally staged as a musical drama, with dancers, slides and film projections, plus an eight-channel sound system delivering the sonic elements listed above via medium of tape playback. As noted, I think there's a story going on somewhere, but the themes of the poetry (at least in English translation) are distant and incomprehensible. Listening to it is not a totally insufferable experience since there are moments of twittering delicacy that are unusual and pleasing. And only a crass fool would dismiss Bodin, who is an important Swedish artist, active since the 1960s, and is credited with the invention of text-sound composition (along with Bengt Emil Johnson). The CD issue is a digital remaster of work originally issued in 1977 as an LP on the Fylkingen label. It has a couple of bonus tracks from 1986 and 1973; these are very ordinary electronic instrumental meanderings, sounding much like The Residents on an off day.

ED PINSENT 19/07/2006

www.fylkingen.se

Terry Riley and ARTE Quartett

Assassin Reverie

USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80558-2 CD (2005)

Nigh-flawless collection of recent recordings by this certified genius, maestro and towering giant of US minimalism. I've never been disappointed in anything I've heard from Riley, and consistently great music pours forth from him on every appearance. Interestingly where Phill Niblock now seems to be looking into borrowing from the work of the 'Onkyo' school (for want of a better term), and players influenced by that area of 'silent' improv, Riley remains true to his many musical traditions – which include Raga, minimalism and jazz. What's more, on this release, he manages to blend these styles together in exciting ways and never once falls on his face while doing so.

It helps when you have strong collaborators. All the recordings here are played by the ARTE Quartett, three Swiss players and one German: Beat Hofstetter, Sascha Armbruster, Andrea Formenti and Beat Kappeler. Founded in 1993, this muscular team have the classical sight-reading chops yet remain 'open' to many styles of music; kind of a Kronos Quartet in brass. They seemed an apt choice to join Riley (who plays piano, harpsichord, and sings) to realise these three very varied suites. 'Uncle Jard' opens the disc and is the real 'grabber'. From 1998, this composition allies jazz modes with Raga modes without appearing contrived or silly; imagine the lilting rhythms of Meade Lux Lewis alongside the tricky quarter-tone melodies of Roop Verma. Of particular interest is to hear Riley yawping out the half-scatted lyric in his creaky, mellowed voice, pitching it somewhere between Cab Calloway and a traditional Carnatic Singer. The saxophones manage a convincing syncopated rhythm that, to these ears, improves even on the Rova Saxophone Quartet.

From 2001 we have the composition 'Assassin Reverie'. Riley doesn't appear on this recording, but this loss is more than compensated for the amazing addition of prepared tapes and sound design by Kappeler. The basic composition includes familiar Riley trance-inducing passages of repetition, but is souped up by stretches of contrived chaos, free-form jazzy honking, and of course weird and alien sound effects from the tape-deck. Undoubtedly this semi-narrative and expositional form is intended to convey something of the psychological and hash-induced mental maelstrom undergone by the members of the assassin sect, even if this Hassan-i-Sabah theme has been overworked in counter-culture circles. Riley beats John Zorn at his own game here (I'm thinking of the Cobra games that were supposed to unleash musical hell through the imaginative adoption of random rules in improvisation). Ideally 'Assassin Reverie' should be performed as a theatre piece, with coloured lights; based on what I hear, that would be a twenty-minute episode of stagecraft you're not likely to forget.

'Tread On The Trail' is from 1965, that vintage year when Riley moved to New York, started playing in the Theatre of Eternal Music, and the success of *In C* was one year behind him. He wrote this immediately after *In C*. In this latter recording, twelve saxophones are deployed to generating the steady pulsing effects and the melodic improvisations based on a single root note. Like much of the other fine work on this disc, it manages to swing as loosely as any be-bop jazz composition and drone endlessly as sublimely as anything by La Monte Young.

With some informative notes by Luciano Chessa, we have here an extremely enjoyable, exciting and vital set of work from a certified US maestro whose every release is solid gold.

ED PINSENT 22/10/2006

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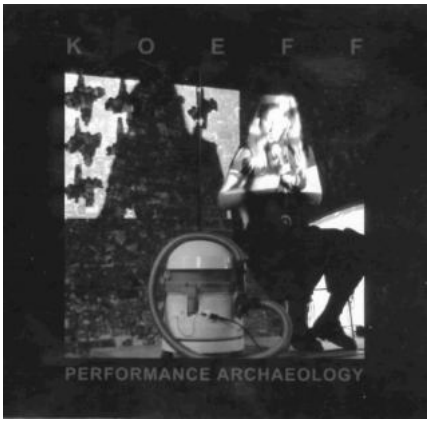
Koeff

Performance Archaeology

SWEDEN FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER1058 CD (2006)

Splendid live recordings of Koeff doing her bizarre stage act. It sounds great immediately – a real grabber it be – and keeps your attention throughout with its lovely combinations of weird noises, clearly recorded in unconventional ways and from strange vantage points. The CD documents her performances from 2003-04, where she hauled noisy



household devices both large and small onto the stage, and let rip – adding her own voice to the resulting tumults, armed only with a mixing board. Amongst said devices were a vacuum cleaner, food mixer, tumble drier and washing machine. She may be making some editorial comment about the domestication of women, and biting back against all the consumerist magazines and adverts that are trying to fence her in. Cleaning the house, in her world, may be equated with a form of brainwashing. Nine tracks' worth of this glorious racket, with baffling anecdotes about the circumstances of their realisation, in the sleeve notes. She can resemble Merzbow with her pounding rhythms (which are determinedly non-sexy in their gyrations), or offer a more abstracted rumbly-chundering noise-a-thon. Some of them are lo-tech and lo-fi recordings, which adds considerable grit to these abrasive anti-normalcy statements. A lot of conviction in her pro-active work, if only in the determination to enact these awkward stagings despite all obstacles; and no hectoring or political qualities to be found in the content. Koeff may be Johanna Rosenqvist; the booklet includes fascinating photos from her 'Spring Cleaning' tour. One of the best CDs I've heard lately from this label. Matter of fact, it's a must!

ED PINSENT 19/07/2006

www.fireworkeditionrecords.com

Gordon Mumma

Electronic Music of Theatre and Public Activity

USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80632-2 CD (2005)

I've only gotten into a couple of tracks on this latest very attractive collection compiled by New World, but they're both dense and rich gems. Mumma is one of my personal faves emerging from the Sonic Arts Union mafia of the 1960s, although Robert Ashley is probably still the 'king' and has been consistently groovy ever since, and David Behrman's *Wave Train* record continues to win prizes for its unbeatable mind-bending powers. Here, a selection of Mumma goodies 1964-1980; the piece from 1964 alone should justify your immediate interest.

'Megaton for William Burroughs', at 22 minutes, is an absorbing example of 'electronic theatre'. It was composed for the ONCE Group in Ann Arbor, where Mumma curated the ONCE Festival 1961-66; a box set of recordings from these events has been reviewed in these pages by Chris Atton. This 'Megaton' was highly dramatic, a noisy anti-war statement filled with sounds of jet fighter planes and bomb explosions. Pre-recorded tapes were played back over loudspeakers, and the piece was supplemented by a team of five players on stage playing at being fighter pilots, and making a kind of 'sound-sculpture' performance. They wore helmets with earpieces where they could hear the playback, and darted about while dodging the steel objects on wires flying overhead. Starting off with a huge roaring wall of noise – evoking a 50-megaton bomb exploding – the piece evolves into a montage of dialogue and music from war hero movies. Naturally all is deployed in a sinister way to suggest the unstoppable menace of the industrial war machine, and the idea of 'war heroism' is subverted by the sarcastic juxtaposition of the war-movie samples with all the surrounding sonic mayhem. This is almost a James Rosenquist canvas in sound, and much more subtle; plus there's an intended homage to Burroughs, master of the literary cut-up and himself an avowed enemy of US militarism. A truly radical piece, still inventive and disturbing today (not much has changed in US foreign policy), and also great to listen to.

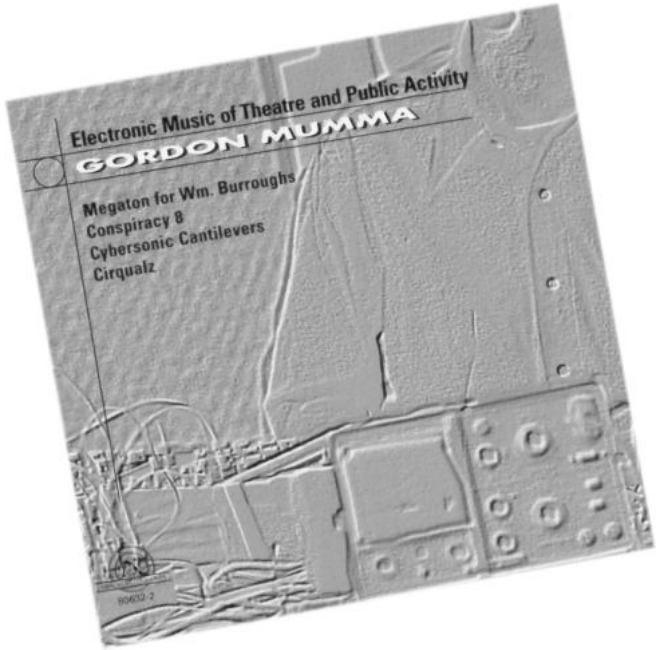
Liner notes take an overview and make a case for claiming the USA as the country that 'invented' the activity of using live electronics in avant-garde music. The process begins in 1958 with John Cage's *Fontana Mix*; I think Cage also defined the two main modes of doing it, either using pre-recorded tapes in a live performance situation, or by using electronic circuits as instruments in a real-time situation. This precision of thinking

about the field is welcome, an antidote to the catch-all description 'electronic music'; although there may also be some cultural imperialism at work here, attempting to assert America's position within a continuum of activity traditionally claimed as an exclusive preserve of the French and German schools. And wanting to be the 'first', which is a typically American ambition. However, this 'Megaton' piece contains ample evidence that Mumma was an important and energetic figure in developing these Cagean principles and doing so in exciting ways.

'Conspiracy 8' is from 1970, a co-performance Mumma did with Stephen Smoliar, and it's 18 minutes of sumptuous, clunky, low-key noise. What you hear is strange plunkety-rhythms and insane squealing sounds, apparently conducted in the rarefied atmosphere of the laboratory. A lab of sound-art perhaps, where noise grows in a Petri dish. Meanwhile, the small invited audience is laughing their heads off. When you hear sonic material of this depth and quality, you wonder why every table-noise clunker active since 1980 is even bothering to get out of bed. 'Conspiracy 8' ought to be played at very loud volume to everyone who's a fan of TNB, Merzbow, MSBR, etc (or for anyone who's thinking about making a career out of imitating them). Table noise began here…in 1970!

This is quite some way from Mumma's intentions of course. In fact, this little sonic episode had a political punch – it was meant to be saying something about the Chicago Conspiracy trial, an event headlining every copy of the *Washington Post* at this time. To make his point, Mumma does nothing so direct as sloganeering or ranting about this hot potato; instead he had ideas about a 'theatre of communication', and in his sonic composition he wanted to re-create the actual experience of the trials, and attempt to understand what they meant. His work's structure is thus filled with unpredictable events, communication failures, and constant tension; and it ultimately assumes the shape of a paranoid arena where the rules are changing all the time. With this tricky structure, Mumma hoped to raise questions, provoke doubts, generate productive lines of thought. I'm totally in favour of this imaginative approach to music or sound-art; great art should *evoke* an experience in real time, not simply describe it.

Mumma achieved this arena of confusion by having his friend Smoliar 'playing' an early digital computer; seated at the teletype, he operated the clunky console and effected real-time sonic manipulation of the sounds



within the environment. Mumma himself played a musical saw, which accounts for those weird squealing noises which I thought were a Theremin. It also accounts for why the audience were chuckling so much. Must've been the height of comedy to see an avant-garde sound-merchant acting like a vaudeville entertainer. The audience too were wired up; the sounds of their talking, and laughter, were likewise captured into this maelstrom, and fed back into the mix by Smoliar at the controls. So, not only is 'Conspiracy 8' great to listen to, but it's a significant experiment in early live electronics, audience participation, and cybernetics, and one filled with layered ideas about a very specific political scenario. Where else can you get that much compressed data in 18 minutes? Admirable!

Also here: 'Cybersonic Cantilevers' from 1973, and a short piece 'Cirqualz' from 1980 for a dance ensemble. Not played these yet.

ED PINSENT 28/08/2006 - 11/10/2006

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Solmaz Sporel and Ilhan Mimaroglu

Pamak Coçuk: muzikli ve oyunlu masal

USA CREELPONE NO NUMBER CD (2005)

Here's a delightful dramatised retelling of a European fairy-tale, possibly 'Tom Thumb' or similar, recorded some time during the 1960s or 1970s for a Turkish-language audience, with the added bonus of electronic music / musique concrète accompaniment by Ilhan Mimaroglu, an early exponent of formal electronic music in both Turkey and the United States. It's a short piece at 18 minutes dominated by a female narrator (presumably Solmaz Sporel) with help from four voice actors one of whom is an excitable child actor whose high-pitched voice conveys every emotion from joy to surprise and gives the impression of a loveable little brat without the slightest trace of Hollywood-style smart-alecky smarminess or sentimentality. The fact that everything is said in Turkish means that those of us not conversant in the language must rely on the intonations of the actors as to their feelings and to get some idea of what's happening; having not heard much spoken Turkish previously, I'm surprised that it's a very melodious language and quite charming and seductive in its own way, at least in the mouths of Solmaz Sporel and the skippetty child actor!

The music tends to be low-key and usually comes in brief intervals to enhance the story as it progresses. Mostly melodic and not too avant-garde for its own sake, the soundtrack is a mixture of organ-like melodies, rhythm sequences and spacey special effects for the purpose of emphasising parts of the action or statements or moving the narrative along. Probably the music's not all that different from what the BBC Radiophonic Workshop was doing at the same time with TV shows like *Doctor Who* but the idea of using such music to support the narration of a children's story on vinyl would have been unusual in most Western industrialised countries of the period, let alone a mostly agricultural developing nation! Unfortunately the CD sleeve only reproduces the original vinyl record front and back sleeves which are both in Turkish and carry no translations, not even the original date of release. From what I have been able to glean about Mimaroglu on the internet, his own output has been very sparse but he's a busy fellow nevertheless and lives in New York City; for 30 years he worked at Atlantic Records (owned by the Ertegun brothers who were also Turkish) producing records for jazz artists. The sound quality of the CD repressing is excellent, the music being very crisp and resonant yet not hard on the ear. Indeed, the Goldilocks principle is very relevant here: the music is bright and intriguing yet not too way-out and sounding just familiar (but only just!), suiting its context very well and this perhaps is where Mimaroglu's talent in composing, shaping and promoting electronic music really shines.

JENNIFER HOR

www.mimaroglumusicsales.com

Bernhard Gál

Installations

AUSTRIA GROMOGA RECORDS gro 10501 CD (2005)

Austrian Bernhard Gál's been 'doing' cross-media installations since 1998 and probably even earlier for all I know, and last year an overview of his work was published in Germany. This CD is a separate supplement to the big printed catalogue of the same name that came out in 2005 under the Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg imprint and it comprises 19 excerpts from his mighty past oeuvre. Some of them have already been heard / received in TSP, for example 'Hinaus:: In den. Wald.' came out in Austria in 2004, and comprised a sonic environment based around the texts of Adolf Wölfli, the Swiss outsider artist-genius. 'Defragmentation/Red' and 'Defragmentation/Blue' have also been previously issued, the latter on Plate Lunch in 2000. This comp is just terriff! Although under ideal circumstances I suppose you need to hear each piece in entirety and preferably inside some cold, white-walled art gallery in Europe, this collection of extracts works very well at home as an audio experience in its own right. This is largely because it's been edited to produce 'highlights' of the 'abstract musical qualities of 19 interwoven compositions'. Some of the early pieces use a lot of voices – voice recordings made into loops, relooped and layered into the piece, then expanded further in yet more interesting ways, or distorted into far-out sonic events; each work seems packed with minimal meaning, stressing its simple points through repetition and extension. Other works create artificial spaces that you can wander around in – sometimes even float around in them, as they seem to defy the normal laws of gravity, and are filled with air and light. Yet another simply uses recordings of a dot-matrix computer printer, reusing the tapes until it turns the rhythms of that machine into a form of music. Then there's 'Klangbojen', which features more familiar field recordings like birdsong and church bells, and transcends these sources to create a truly magical atmosphere. In all an extremely interesting, beautiful and highly worthwhile collection, presenting many aspects of these slow and careful exploratory sound-art works. Highly recommended.

ED PINSENT 13/08/2006

www.gromoga.com

Lise-Lotte Norelius

In Sea

SWEDEN FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER1057 CD (2005)

Pleasing set of art-mode electronic 'studioworks' by this Swedish composer, realised in the EMS studios in Stockholm between 2000 and 2003. A couple of them were commissions and one of them has a Fylkingen link. The collection may be vaguely themed on the experience of life under the sea; not a wholly original choice of topic, perhaps, but always an effective one. Norelius delivers many excellent and weird sound effects, floating like undefined solids in her gloopy and droney ocean, as she fishes around with a wide net. 'RP-Bob' is an exciting and dynamic arrangement of fast-moving beeps and whirrs, where 'In Sea' is conversely empty and soaring airy drone matter. 'Crayfish at Death's Door' wins prize for the best title, is a great piece and is extremely illustrative, and I think is the only piece to feature actual water sounds on what is clearly a very maritime-themed work. On the other hand, track three may be something to do with work beneath the ground, concerned with a mining area near

Norberg; it's called 'Hints from the Lady of the Mine' and attempts to seek sublimation in an otherwise dreary and industrialised subject. A high-minded electro-acoustic release, but not so studious that you can't drown yourself in its watery depths.

ED PINSENT 22/07/2006

www.fireworkeditionrecords.com

Hanna Hartman

Longitude / Cratere

SWEDEN KOMPLOTT ESCUDRE06 CD (2005)

German resident Swedish soundstriss Hanna Hartman specialises in an intriguing aural blend lying somewhere between musique concrète and field recording. Both of the pieces on this CD were originally commissioned for radio, 'Cratere' by DeutschlandRadioBerlin (try saying that quickly), and 'Longitude 013° 26' E' by the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. You can just imagine these sparse sounds suddenly hitting you on the radio as you happened upon them randomly, most likely you'd think that the end of the world had come at last, and that you were perhaps the last remaining soul around to hear it being broadcast.

'Longitude 013° 26' E', (which runs through Berlin, Kap Arkona, and the Baltic Sea, perhaps linking Hartman's native Sweden with her chosen country of residence) consists for he most part of sounds recorded on sailing boats. Judging from the slippery catch Hartman has pulled from the cold depths they were obviously out for a relaxing summers day trying to catch the mythological Kraken, foul scourge of the northern seas. It also features Annette Krebs doing a nice job on prepared guitar, and Robert G. Patterson sounding off on Horn. It's a rough ride into a dark abyss where the chances of coming back alive are very slim indeed.

'Cratere' on the other hand is hardly easy going. It features recordings of the Italian volcano Etna rumbling, hissing and breathing, sounding like a living creature that's about to blow its top any minute, possibly with your ears in the way. Not to say that it's in any way a loud piece, far from it. In fact, like Hartman's other composition here it's full of wonderfully created sonic suspense. German improv mainstay Reinhold Friedl turns up, along with David Balzer, both contributing on something called 'neobechstein', which is possibly something like a piano but sounds suitably like some slimy Wagnerian earth demon. Two compositions, two scary trips into the elemental unknown. What more can one ask?

AARON ROBERTSON

www.komplott.com
www.hannahartman.de

Various Artists

Greek Electronic Music – 1

USA CREELPONE #CREELP GREEK CD (ND)

Tirelessly the Creelpone time machine works to reissue more gems of electronic music from the 1960s-70s of which this compilation of works by six Hellenic electro-geeks sparkles more brightly than a few I have heard so far. These fellas might not be household names like the great 20th century composer Iannis Xenakis, to whose stature they might have aspired and maybe even hoped to surpass, but what the heck, the music on offer sounds as if these guys' ambition and enthusiasm were running hot as most pieces are very wacky and full of fun. Michael Adamis's 'Metallike Glypta III' ('Metal Sculptures III') wakes the early birds among us with rumbles and distant trumpet noises that soon erupt into a cacophony of metal sheets and pans all tumbling around and fighting one another. The chaos continues with the grating shrieks of 'To Allithoro Psari' ('The Squinty Fish') from Dimitris Terzakis: the title itself indicates the track's not to be taken too seriously and indeed it strides about without a care in the world blowing electronic raspberries before collapsing into a long drone. Stephanos Vassiliadis keeps the flag flying for the noisy impertinent side with the cheeky 'Kouklokosmos' ('Puppet World'): whistles, train rhythms, bleeps 'n' blurps and babbling conversations between dolphins and guinea pigs all high on amphetamines can be found here. On vinyl, these three tracks would have been a truly amazing mind-warping A-side.

Nikos Mamangakis's 'Olofyrmos' ('Lamentation') offers a delicate if rather ghostly and precious respite from the previous hyper-activity: despite the title, it seems rather like a field recording of a peculiar forest full of strange chirpy metal alien insects and as it progresses, it reveals something of its

own slightly demented nature. Suppose we pumped Australian musician Oren Ambarchi full of intoxicating sticky green juice from some South American plan the properties of which are a complete mystery to all save a few Amazon Indian shamans and let the guy loose on some cymbals, bells and maybe a xylophone, and he might produce something similar to this track. Next up, Charis Xanthoudakis's 'Study III' seems relatively sane but there are many creepy noise throughout. Bringing up the rear, Yannis Vlachopoulos's 'Morphes II' ('Forms II') bashes together chainsaw screams, recordings of children's voices, crowd noises, snooker games and Greek folk music, and duct-tapes the lot together with a mix of various found sounds which are often quite distorted; the whole thing seems disorganised and threatens to collapse but the middle part of the track seems to have a bit more internal order than the rest however drunk and disorderly it becomes.

If you thought electronic music of 40 years ago (the original vinyl compilation came out in 1967 of which apparently only 20 copies were sold and according to the Creelpone website now selling for over US$200 on eBay) was all very formal, serious and totally lacking in humour and self-mockery, this compilation will be a real eye opener (and ear opener as well). A very fun listening experience and an interesting peek at the electronic music scene that existed in Greece at the time.

JENNIFER HOR

www.mimaroglumusicsales.com

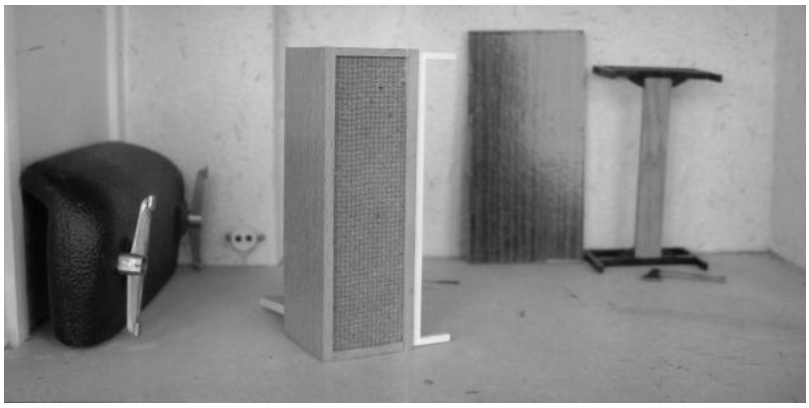
Marcus Schmickler / John Tilbury

Variety

GERMANY A-MUSIK A 29 CD (2005)

Excellent 'art music' statement which I'll say upfront will appeal to lovers of Morton Feldman's music. It has the same simplicity, directness, and centre of calm assurance. Piano with computer treatments is how it's done. AMM are no longer a group, the whisper puts out; as Rowe pursues his solo career with his tabletop guitar, it's very good to receive evidence of the great John Tilbury continuing to exercise his pianoforte muscles. He pits his grand piano against live electronics in a bold, fearless way. When he locked antlers with MIMEO in 2002, on *The Hands of Caravaggio*, there

were about a dozen formidable electronic opponents for him to face; he emerged scarred, but unbeaten. In 2003, for *Absinth* on the GROB label, only three enemies blocked his path and he came away besting two out of the three. The duo approach documented on this release might be the best example yet; certainly no bloodshed this time.



Using ears alone, I have no idea what's happening on these forty-some minutes, except that Marcus S is contributing interjections of minimal clicks, whirrs, crackles, and very sharp whooshes, not unlike the great David Tudor in a superficial way. He is also, it seems, 'inside' the piano. This might mean his physical frame is so thin that he can lay alongside the wires and cause little interference to the performance (he is only six inches high, as is well known). Another German musician who has also climbed inside the piano is Andrea Neumann, who is likewise only five or six inches high. Tilbury's piano creates a rather skeletal structure of ideas, fully informed by his long-standing and pioneering service in the field of cutting-edge modernism, taking in everything from Cage to Cardew and of course Feldman, of whose music he is the foremost interpreter in the UK (I'm still looking for the four-CD collection on Extraplatte).

Additionally this record is full of strong presence and precision and consequently sounds absolutely fantastic. Its recording fidelity gives an added sumptuousness to music that is otherwise cold and distant. It emerges as a crystal-clear picture of some glacial, remote, and untouchable beauty. Recorded in Cologne in 2004, and arrives in a spartan sleeve whose typography frames an obscure text, one whose provenance and meaning is actually very far from clear, yet it gives immediate impression of being something totally germane to the piece in question. That's the power of modernism for you.

ED PINSENT 28/08/2006

www.a-musik-com

John Tilbury

Barcelona piano solo

ITALY ROSSBIN RECORDS RS021 CD (2005)

Piano genius John Tilbury went to a festival in Barcelona in 2003 and recorded this 36-minute performance on the grand. His precise and ordered style on the prepared piano makes it hard to believe that this is improvised music; he brings in so much intellect and thoughtfulness, instead of the usual sweat and violence we sometimes get with sweaty, violent improvisers. Plenty of Feldman-esque chord clusters and minimal patterns reminiscent of Mortie's compositional approach, plus residual elements of Tilbury's John Cage fixation, including 'inside-piano' scrapes and squeaks of a non-musical nature. A vivid digital recording by Ferran Conangla that will charm and amaze. Packed in an elaborate card wallet that unfolds into a trapezoid shape. You could keep this on your bookshelf to display the lovely 10mm spine.

ED PINSENT 22/10/2006

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www.rossbin.com

Susumu Yokota

Symbol

UK LO RECORDINGS LCD45 CD (2005)

One of those records in which the construction of the music is perhaps more significant than the actual music itself and the impact it has on the listener, *Symbol* is a fusion of dance rhythms, electronic effects and snippets of nineteenth and twentieth century Western orchestral music. The overall effect is quite pleasant, everything is seamless and samples slide into one another smoothly, with few if any moments of real drama and a brisk pace throughout: each track whisks you through a number of samples of music snatched from works by Beethoven, Debussy, Mahler, Offenbach, Prokofiev, Saint Saens and Tchaikovsky among others, united by a dance rhythm or two (and they're not disco dance rhythms by the way) and sometimes singing by Meredith Monk. Track titles describe what you may expect to hear: 'traveller in the wonderland' features passages of music redolent of Middle Eastern bazaars, caravanserais and other exotica and 'fairy dance of twinkle and shadows' conjures up visions of the little people staging an elaborate masque with bells, chimes, serene strings and dulcet tones.

I confess I'm not greatly moved by this album overall; certainly I can admire the skill and elegance with which Yokota has assembled all thirteen pieces from disparate bits so they seem more or less 'organic'. A fair amount of research must have been involved in finding suitable source material and working out which can go with what. The music is very busy and as each track is not long, the listener doesn't have much time to savour it and may feel unwillingly swept along. Each piece has a static quality as though Yokota intended to create impressionistic sonic snapshots of particular scenes from life and leave them at that. Something about the music reminds me of the Japanese animation group Studio Ghibli's movies *Whispers from the Heart*, *The Cat Returns* and *My Neighbour Tottoro* in which the action takes place in a mixture of typically bustling Japanese urban environments, quiet rural settings and fantasy sequences: these particular movies are aimed at children and have less of the ambiguity and complexity of more famous Studio Ghibli creations like *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*. Some tracks like 'blue sky and yellow sunflower' seem to have a forced and contrived gaiety and I can imagine less forgiving listeners than I smelling manipulation of the sinister kind and a creeping kitsch quality on this recording.

JENNIFER HOR

www.lorecordings.com

Phillip Werren

Electronic Music (1968-1971)

CANADA CAST EXOTIC ARCHIVES X003 2 x CD (2006)

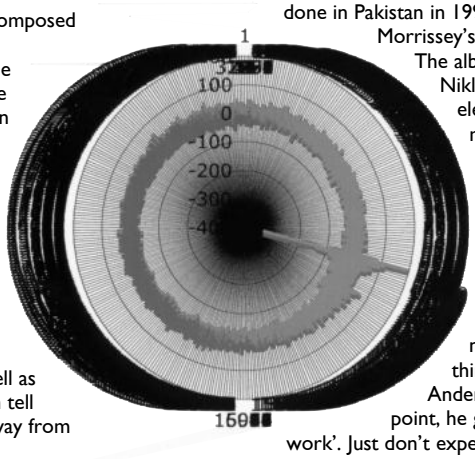
Heard about half of 'Phases I' from 1969, and realised early on I couldn't get too excited about this double-CD collection of this Canadian electro-acoustic composer's work. He's too literal and too linear for me. On 'Phases I' he lays out his gloopy electronic music, using the then-new Buchla and Moog systems, alongside the treated taped voices of two collaborators reciting poetry fragments excerpted from the work of W. B. Yeats. What strikes you during the longeurs of Werren's work is the lack of structure and development; he just carries on making these endless explorations into vast territories of shapeless, unvarying textures. How one yearns for a signpost, a marker to let you know you're getting somewhere; but instead it's like trudging through the Phantom Zone on a snowy day. The sounds themselves aren't especially exciting either; they resemble industrial complexes, factories, recorded from a distance. I sense no warmth, a resultant you might expect from cold, academic, modernist experimentation (often accused of being clinical), but Werren even lacks the conceptual rigour. There may have been some systematic or structured process behind his composition, but no evidence of it is made available here; in his own notes, we quickly learn that his attachment to the poetry of Yeats has led him into romantic, overly-personal directions and associations, nebulous emotions which he fails to communicate successfully. He also looks back with a wistful eye on his heady youth

during 1968 at the University as though it were a life-changing, philosophical experience. For him, maybe! For us listeners, absolutely no sense of the upheavals either in his own life or those of society around him shows up in the flat, dreary music.

Werren was based at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, where he presumably had access to the costly equipment used to realise these works: the Buchla and Moog systems, filters, tape recorders, and varispeed. The resulting pieces were originally issued as a 4 LP boxed set in 1971, in an edition of 100 copies only. That original issue is presumably highly scarce outside of North American libraries, so this reissue is useful in that regard, and given the continued interest in all forms of early electronic music, it's another piece in the puzzle. However, aesthetically speaking, I fear that it's another example of a rediscovery of something we don't really need. Working through 'Phases II' I find it's simply a continuation of 'Phases I' with all the same attendant problems. I was however interested to learn that Werren's inspiration in composing 'Phases' I-III came from Yeats' interest in the occult. As the world knows, in the late 19th century this mystical poet joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and probably took part in seances. Sadly, little of the mystery of this exotica can be found in Werren's work; unlike Mick Jagger's Moog soundtrack for Kenneth Anger's *Invocation Of My Demon Brother*, which also came out in 1969, and is genuinely unsettling and enriched with dark satanic vibes. I suppose in Werren's world though, anything like that associated with populist sources (cinema and pop music) is immediately discounted. 'Phases III' appears in its glorious entirety on disc two, and this one takes stock of the two preceding pieces, manipulates parts of them, and purports to be 'demonic' in its operations. You decide.

'To Phyllis' is a 1971 piece dedicated to and composed for a dancer, using the moog and radio samples. Whenever I hear of avant composers getting involved in dance in any way whatsoever, nine times out of ten I can feel my inner man yawning. Werren's foray into this multi-media zone produces a piece less murky than what we've heard so far, but it's still pointless, dribbly, and muffled, full of vague abstractions. 'I tried to match Phyllis' energy', claims Werren; he failed.

'Whale Piece' dates from 1970-71 and was also composed for a dance workshop. Moog and treated recordings of water sounds form his tribute to the mighty sea-going mammals. On shorter pieces like this, I find there is marginally more variety than on the dismal disc one, but still the lack of substance and shape (which are two attributes I'd immediately associate with these gigantic deep-sea monsters) troubles me. 'I hope to play this piece to whales', quoth the eco-friendly composer. Well, I bet Greenpeace thanked him for that!



'Polish Wedding Music' is from 1967 and showed early promise; it was created at Radio Warsawa (presumably by accessing the record library as well as the electronic equipment) and right away you can tell Werren's thrown off balance by having to play away from home. This obstacle could have injected some tension, but it's not long before this fragmented instrumental music is rendered down into a yawn-worthy mosaic of empty blather. I'd imagine the original recordings of Polish music were lively, life-affirming, and compressed statements of joy. How is it this man seems to drain the energy from anything and everything he comes into contact with?

Final verdict: Werren was a low-talent, pompous, egotistical bore. Avoid this dull double CD and go and read a book instead.

ED PINSENT 26-27/07/2006

www.castexotic.com

Henrik Andersson

Henrik Andersson

SWEDEN FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER1060 CD (2006)

A short but sweet album of the highly conceptual kind from Stockholm based artist Henrik Andersson, who divides his time in the frozen north between visual art, performance and music. The seven tracks on this CD are all taken from various performances and installations done in 2005, both in his native Sweden and Romania. To give you some idea of the nature of the material contained therein, the album appears on the Firework edition label, co-founded by eternal art prankster Leif Elggren, better known for his work with groups like the Sons of God, or as the self-declared King of Elgaland-Vargaland.

All the tracks seem to involve varying attempts at Nordic humour, which for the most part seems to come off being just a little clinical, as possibly befits the albums conceptual modus operandi. The CD's second track for example is derived from the last known instance of a nuclear bomb test, done in Pakistan in 1998. For its title Andersson has dryly quoted one of Morrissey's lyrics from, you guessed it, 'Louder than Bombs'. The album's final track is a mostly improvised jam between Niklas Korsell on drums, and Andersson playing an electric bass, on which the frets have been cunningly modified according to a ratio given in Karl Marx's theory on aggregate investment.

I'm sure that some folks will find such carry-on hilariously funny; obviously the people at Firework do. For myself it seems a little symptomatic of the state in which the art world (especially that ugly beast called 'sound art') finds itself: largely introverted and self-referential. That being said it's no bad thing to have ideas, and even less of a bad thing to base your creations on said ideas. At least Andersson has done us the service of not labouring the point, he gets in and out before you can say 'I prefer his early work'. Just don't expect any belly laughs from this one and you'll be fine.

AARON ROBERTSON

www.fireworkeditionrecords.com

Vaclav Nelhybel

Electronic Music

USA CREELPONE NO NUMBER CD (2005)

Very eccentric and quite spooky is this little electroacoustic gem from 1966 unearthed by one of my favourite labels Creelpone. Where and how the guys who run the label get obscure little numbers like this Nelhybel recording they never say which in this day and age is very wise of them: I'm sure the Department of Homeland Security or some other 'law and order' US Federal agency would like to get its collective mitts and chainsaws on the Creelpone time machine. This particular recording

preserves the original 1966 vinyl record sleeve cover and disc information but has no other information about the artist Vaclav Nelhybel (1919 - 1996). All 26 pieces, none longer than 80 seconds, have titles which speak of extra-terrestrial phenomena and interplanetary exploration but the use of electronic organ and piano, played in rather unusual ways such as repetitive banging and plonking and trilling up and down the keys, in amongst the electronic instruments and tape recorders imparts a sinister and slightly carnivalesque tone to the entire record, so the effect is rather like a mini-soundtrack to a long-forgotten cult sci-fi / horror film short nestling in a dusty corner of a university library archives. The music itself plots out the story: tones convey a whole gamut of emotions and impressions from wonder and curiosity to apprehension, fear and shock; lively rhythms push the 'action' and 'drama:' along, and the listener only needs to fill in the visual details. It's obvious that not only did Nelhybel bring his vastly extensive and thorough knowledge of musical composition (his body of works includes operas, concertos and symphonies) to the creation of an electronic mini sound opera, he brought along as well a mischievous sense of humour and an open-minded approach to pushing an idea or piece of music as far as it can go and seeing where it ends up. No matter how many times I play this recording, it always seems to end far too quickly. A very delightful listening experience and a good introduction to the work of the Czech-American composer Nelhybel himself.

JENNIFER HOR

www.mimaroglumusicsales.com

Phill Niblock

Touch Three

UK TOUCH TO:69 3 x CD (2006)

A triple-CD set by this significant US Minimalist composer; the last release I heard on Touch was his *Touch Works for Hurdy Gurdy and Voice* in 2000. 2003's *Touch Food* didn't reach my desk. Phill now makes extensive use of computer technology to realise his works; all nine (long) tracks here were made with the help of Protools and an Apple Mac. For each work, he recorded a single instrument to create soundfiles, and edited the results into single tones, using the editing software to repeat them and stack them up into 24 or 32 multitracked events. The details of his working methods are to be found in the booklet; it does come across as very process-based. Earlier works, even those represented on the double-CD from Blast First, likewise show Niblock making overdubs, but doing it in the old-fashioned, analogue, labour-intensive way, handling a physical object (magnetic tape) and not moving bytes around on a screen. I'm not saying either way is better, but my initial impression of results on these three discs is that they are rather muted, far less physically invasive than that early material, which is so powerful it practically crowds you out of the room. However, simply reach for the volume control and you will be compensated in this regard.

'The microtones are doing the work,' Mr Niblock assures us. The participating musicians were Ulrich Krieger on the alto sax, Franz Hautzinger on trumpet, Martin Zrost on soprano sax, Lucia Mense on recorders, Seth Josel on acoustic guitars and Arne Deforce in cello. With this range of instrumentation, you'll note that Niblock is able to connect his work to histories of chamber music, jazz, and folk music, and offer condensed minimalised improvements all his own. His 'Tribute to Charlie Parker' lends some weight to this possibility, resulting in a pleasing arrangement that combines two wholly American musical idioms (jazz and minimalism) in a knowledgeable and effective way.

Niblock is an exacting perfectionist; he believes strongly in capturing and adjusting acoustic subtleties that you or I probably wouldn't even notice, and works hard to represent them. He insists on good quality equipment and ideal environmental conditions to do it. The results are here in these long, stately, unchanging, single-note and multi-microtoned sculptures in sound, the best of which can appear almost monumental.

ED PINSENT 03/09/2006

www.touchmusic.org.uk

Civil War

The Brutality of Fact

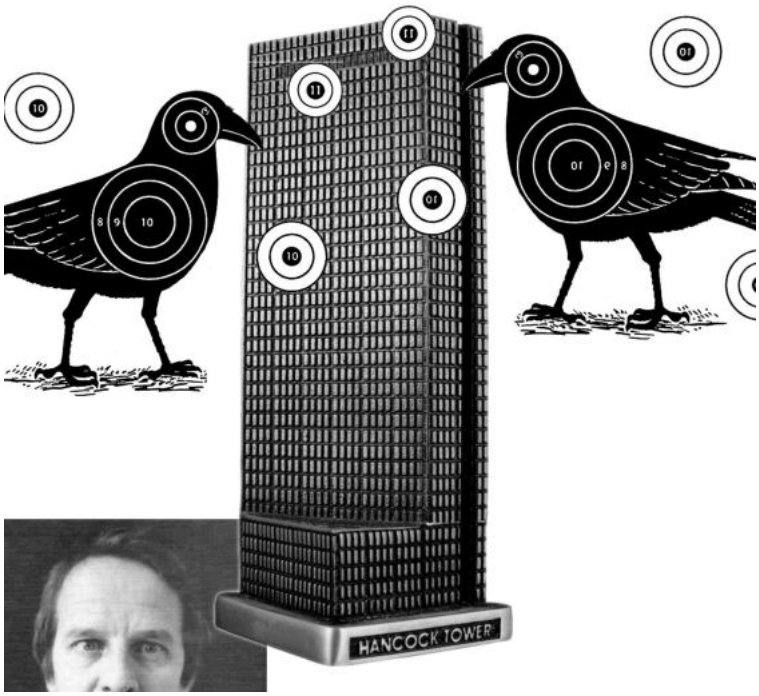
USA LONGBOX RECORDINGS LBT037 CDR (2005)

Impressive set of short low-key acoustic pieces played on viola, percussion and bassoon. Now my first thought is, if only 'proper' classical records were recorded just like this, then our problems would soon be over. (I never yet heard a classical LP or CD that was loud or bold enough for my tastes). With Civil War, you can hear every creak, key-clack and harmonic generated by their instruments, information that's telling you something about the way instruments actually behave. Of course I realise this is the sort of radicalism that the classical recording industry would regard as the enemy – engineers are trained to treat such things as recording faults to be avoided, and this approach would be the kiss of death for any commercial appeal. Well, not only can you hear those things here, you can also hear some very fine music too. Not upbeat music; but it has lots of sharp edges, depths, tensions, and it casts long, deep black shadows whichever way you look. I guess these things too are anathema to any listeners who love Mozart played in the tasteful manner, but I care not for their bourgeois tastes. Katherine Young, on this recording, has a bassoon that can bark and bleat like any beast of the field. In her hands, that inanimate stick of wood is a living creature. Amy Cimini clasps her bony fingers around a viola that shudders, reels, and strikes you like a cobra; it cuts you deep, and drains your blood as surely as any vampire. Adam Sonderberg beats a snare drum that rattles like a full regiment on the march, out to wreak havoc on the battlefield – in fine it has all the strident martial associations you'd expect from a Civil War. Nathan Moomaw recorded this in Wisconsin. If Sony Classical had any real sense, Nathan Moomaw would be a full-time recording engineer on their payroll, and his ideas would be listened to. But this is the real world we're living in. From 2004, packaged in a lurid green and black silkscreened cover. I can't believe this is only a CDR in an edition of 200 copies; this quantity does not seem commensurate with its cultural significance.

ED PINSENT 09/08/2006

www.longboxrecordings.com

THE INTUITION, TELLURIC SKILLS AND CROWS OF CARL MICHAEL VON HAUSSWOLFF



Collage by Ed Pinsent

Carl Michael Von Hausswolff

There are no crows flying around the Hancock Building

USA LAMPO 001 CD (2005)

Another brilliant sound art realisation by the scary Swede Carl Michael, whom we interviewed in issue 10. I still find it odd why this fellow's minimal and empty work is frequently so compelling for me, especially given my current antipathy to anything bearing the name of his good friend and collaborator, fellow Swede Leif Elggren. CMVH's work continues to fill me with a sense of imminent doom, while Elggren just remains an annoying trickster. Yet both deal in droning electronics and processed field recordings. This disc is an example of the latter. When invited to Chicago by the Lampo Organisation, Carl Michael took his tape recorder to capture whatever local sounds he saw fit in that robust meat-packing town. When taken to the top of the very tall Hancock Building in Michigan Avenue, he was able to regard stunning urban vistas from the observation post while simultaneously taping the fascinating ambiences available at this vantage point 1,000 feet in the air. As the Observatory has an open-air skywalk, he got some great air and wind recordings (and what else wouldja expect from the Windy City?), but he also picked up some distant sounds of traffic from streets below, and snatches of gabbled conversation from American tourists within earshot on that circular platform. Once secured, these recordings were smuggled home in his cloth sack to Stockholm, where he added some electronic low-end drone sounds to the tapes as he edited them.

Empty process art, you may say? Well there's just so much we can say about this…to begin with, one part of the process that's relevant is taking site-specific recordings from Chicago, and giving them back to Chicago to be released by the Lampo Organisation. For about 20 years CMVH has been employing similar strategies, capturing ambient sounds from a city during the day, and playing them back to an audience in that same city by night. Then there's the underlying symbolism…the crow element in the title is supplied by CMVH (you don't hear any birds cawing on the CD). He takes crows as symbols for guardians, or perhaps as symbols for attackers. Think of the ravens at the Tower of London. But CMVH has a more sinister intent, perhaps one laced with contemporary paranoia about terrorist attacks. We're informed he's 'asking questions about security'. And he has used birds as a metaphor before. On the CD *Rays Of Beauty*, for example: 'For a duration of one week I lived in the gallery together with three chickens, PBAC, BPUC and PBOC,' he told this magazine in 2002. 'Their names were given to them because of the sound they make when they communicate.'

Thirdly, there's the artist's abiding interest in contemporary urban architecture, his engagement with it, and his interest in lecturing the audience about it – always in the most oblique way imaginable. See for example, *Disturbances in Architecture* (FER 1036) and *Three Overpopulated Cities*... (SUB ROSA SR 217). The thread is explored further in an accompanying but totally separate book, *Red Empty*, also published by Lampo. It documents one of Carl's city-based actions, which he's done before in other urban areas. He drives around at night with a small crew of collaborators until he finds a zone he likes. Sets up powerful red spotlights to illuminate chosen area, takes photographs, douses lights, team packs up. Repeat as necessary. He's done similar actions in Liverpool, Japan, Bangkok and Santa Fe. From evidence of this tome, what he likes is a certain feeling of desolation, zones of little or no redeeming quality, function, or beauty; 'in-between' areas, what Bernd Friedmann has called 'nonplace urban fields', dead zones which are often the result of inept urban development. Carl also likes details such as unreadable lettering or the texture of decaying bricks in

fuzzy close-up shots. Well, he'd never get a job with a town planning department, that's for sure! But as a society, I would argue, we need artists to run a highlighter pen over the bleak spots in our cities that have failed us, and continue to fail us; if he needs to do it with red lights and arty photo books, so be it. In London I've noticed a similar though more modest tactic, where certain clandestine cynics have pasted small posters accusingly dubbing The Aldwych a 'Cultural Black Spot', home to several theatres offering *Footloose*, *Dirty Dancing*, *See How They Run* and *The Producers*, and other such empty entertainments, strictly for the squares.

This 40-minute recording is a brilliant example of how CMVH takes city sounds, distant traffic, overheard conversations, and subtly shifts the context of everything that's familiar to us, through very simple strategies. The Hancock Building is a big popular tourist attraction in Chicago – and it's named after one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence. Yet CMVH manages to surround this symbol of nationalist pride and certainty with great ambiguity and tension. It's impressive that he creates so much doubt, raises so many questions, simply by adding a worrying drone sound to a set of documentary recordings and pinning a simple memorable image - a flying crow – to the finished result.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2006

www.lampo.org

John Duncan and Carl Michael von Hausswolff

Our Telluric Conversation

USA 23FIVE 008 CD (2006)

Two of my favourite anti-everything conceptualists knock their brainy noggins together on this powerful release; maybe it's about time these dark maguses of everything that's hypnotic, nasty and minimalistic joined forces, and the vectors of where their distinctive personalities overlap are already producing strange pockets of anti-matter and torrents of negative energy. Duncan is a cruel American who favours extreme situations in his performance art actions, although it's emerging from available evidence that he wouldn't want to inflict anything on his audience-participants (in terms of emotional polarities) that he hadn't already suffered himself. I was, frankly, quite relieved to learn this. Carl Michael is a mysterious Swede often associated with the pranks of Leif Elggren, and like Leif he too may want to communicate with dead spirits through electrical operations, but he also has his own interesting history of layering his art-actions into live, interactive and engaging performance situations, often recycling yesterday's confrontational performance work into today's abrasive art installation. These two high-powered ginks seem made for each other, no? What would be the result of their meeting?

Answers - baffling, inscrutable, minimal; a disc which on the surface appears to be no more noteworthy than any other arty record of droning palaver, of which a thousand such examples already blight today's avant 'scene'. Yet beneath that surface lies a horrifying power. These are three profoundly scary, deep and slow-moving pieces of exceptionally strong sound-art. The second piece, for example, 'Entry (Enhanced)' is like a long black submarine of death, creeping about under icy waters, deep, cold and unfathomable as the 40 fathoms at which it lies. Is this submarine carrying a nuclear weapon? No, something even more deadly than that. The third piece has a long and elaborate title (so elaborate it's almost an in-joke) invoking all manner of post-modern, metaphysical and ontological references, while what you hear oozing from your speaker cones is simply a ghastly low-frequency mechanical humming, with added crackling on top of it. It strikes me this one might the most 'collaborative' piece, whereon each artiste simply does the one basic thing they are most often associated with – CMVH's low amplifier sine-wave humming, Duncan's shortwave radio crackle – and yet when put together, it adds up to something one hundred times as powerful. You could, I suppose, have tried an experiment yourself at home playing previous CDs by both of them simultaneously, but it wouldn't be the same; they met up, they thought of it, they did it, and they are arguably two authentic geniuses of marginal, cancerous minimalism.

Just to skip back to the first track '...Like a Lizard', which proceeds perfectly well for its first half and is then utterly ruined (for me) by a ghastly nightmare story-piece which occupies the second half, a tale full of horrifying images of decay, corruption, death and futility. Seriously nasty! J G Ballard would have a field day, or issue a copyright lawsuit. Is there any need to articulate in such a blatant narrative form the very elements which are so ingeniously and subtly implied by Duncan's most effective pieces? The first half of this 'Lizard' opus is good though, a very decent collage of harsh and repellent sound effects hovering in the usual droney-menace airbag of doom. And the story half which I loathe so much is delivered by a whispering voice, forcing you to strain to listen and catch its every nuance of nastiness; no doubt yet another 'distancing' technique intended to alienate listeners.

The disc arrives packaged in a white slipcase coated to produce a slightly 'rubbery' sensation to the touch; it may be intended to invoke the elemental implications of the title, 'Telluric' referring to a certain type of white metal used by the ancient Greeks for predicting the future. And there's a Braille phrase embossed on the back; am I wrong or has the theme of 'blindness' surfaced more than once in the work of John Duncan, a man who has also dubbed himself 'John See'? Inside there's a black booklet, recording a conversation between the two sound artists (perhaps hosted by Jim Haynes), where the pair reminisce about their careers and their 'greatest hits'. They are both justifiably proud of how their work has resisted any form of appropriation by the mainstream culture, and gone on resisting it for a long time. Carl Michael refers witheringly to the 'culture of the fake', which in his estimation currently dominates everything from cinema to music with its poisonous influence. Both of them are trying to blur the edges in the gallery and performance art arenas, and not just for aesthetic reasons; presumably they are trying to blur the very edges of art and reality. Phew. These 23 Five releases can be simultaneously portentous, infuriating, and exhilarating, and this one is no exception. But the music oozing from the speakers is so damn good, and terrifying; a lot of real 'heaviosity' emerging from so little substance.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2006

www.23five.org

Carl Michael von Hausswolff

The Wonderful World of Male Intuition

CANADA ORAL RECORDS ORAL 10 CD (2006)

Another intriguing and bewildering collection from Mr Von H. This one's a bit more cerebral than the *Hancock Building* CD but not as overtly terrifying as the *Our Telluric Conversation* disc. It features short recordings of voices, every one of which has been severely treated and ring-modulated into unintelligibility; and the CD is structured so that these voice episodes mostly alternate with the longer 'instrumental' pieces of minimal electronica. This is the familiar sonic turf of CMVH, comprising low-end rumbling, endless buzz-filled drones,

weird oscillations and hard-to-endure subsonic frequencies. It's a puzzling listen, but you're so intrigued that you can't help following the carefully-plotted path of this strange map.

Those voice samples are quite alarming at first. That electronic distortion really makes them into something quite alien. Although incomprehensible, they are still recognisable as human speech, and in each case their owners are clearly identified on the cover blurb, with all the contextual precision we expect from this rigourous conceptualist. The names include Willem de Ridder, who has done radio pieces and pranks in the Fluxus mode; John C Lilly, the acid-casualty US scientific 'visionary' who works with brain tanks and talks to dolphins; Brion Gysin, the hepcat beat poet who's so often name-checked as a prime source of everything that's transgressive and strange; Albert Hoffmann, the inventor of LSD; and Friedrich Jürgenson, the pseudo-scientist who devoted a substantial part of his life to collecting and listening to tape recordings of the voices of dead people. Jürgenson is one of CMVH's heroes (the others may be too for all I know), and Carl, who claims to firmly believe in the phenomenon, has executed at least one sound-art work exploring similar spirit-communication notions. Interestingly, Jürgenson's contribution is not the taped voice of a phantom from the spirit world, but an unpublished recording of him playing the piano and singing. However, it's no less eerie.

If there's any commonality to the famous names in this list, it's that (a) they were all outcasts and pariahs, disdaining common sense and established modes of thought as they explored the furthest fringes of their particular fields and (b) they probably got to that point by following their instincts. Hence they form part of this 'wonderful world' that Carl Michael posits. Also included in the roster is a bewildering piece of radio static, contributed by NASA, which turns out to be an 'undetected signal' from outer space; so perhaps CMVH is likening his heroes to aliens, or he's including extra-terrestrial intelligence as just one more example of this unknown and powerful intuitive force. We also have a beautiful image of the moon on the cover, and references to 'confused hawks' and 'digital controller' in the track titles. Perplexing, eh? There's a lot to explore in this opaque release, and I'm sure you will find it surprisingly satisfying to listen to; the simple structure works like a charm, and it ends on a pleasing note with a voice we can actually understand. This CD is one of the most challenging conundrums yet to be posed by this impenetrable and profound composer.

ED PINSENT 29/10/2006

http://www.oral.qc.ca/eng/intro/index.html

QUIET MUSIC

Ronnie Sundin

The Amateur Hermetic

SWEDEN KOMPLOTT ESCUDRE07 CD (2006)

The 'Ronster' does it again, with perhaps his most coherent and compacted statement to date. It's certainly the most effective paean yet realised in his ongoing quest to represent, in sound, the subtleties and wonders of the human dream-state. Plus it has a title which refers to alchemy (of which more below) but was also, I'd like to think, suggested by my line of questioning to him (see interview in issue 13). For 41 minutes this work maintains a beautiful poise and holds the listener in suspended, surreal ecstasy. Not even other much-vaunted musicians who profess an interest in surrealism (Nurse With Wound, Merzbow) have achieved this in such an elegant way; Sundin has a lightness of touch which Stapleton and Akita would do well to take note of.

Sleep being the ongoing motif, *Amateur Hermetic* commences with the sound of regular breathing and snoring, before cascading into sudden passages of rich, floating, rumbling and incredibly layered and limpid pools of sonic subtlety, through whose transparency you can behold still more layers…the effect is of gently bobbing on the ocean of sleep, much like that cinematic dreamer Mia Farrow floating on her ocean-going bed in *Rosemary's Baby*. Evidence of Sundin's unique ingenuity in sound-construction is to be found at index point 12:00, where he pulls off one of his sudden cut-off 'climax' effects and brings in a recording of a thunderclap and a shower of rain, breaking the spell instantly; yet he gently resumes the established hypnotic pattern forthwith. The result is a completely honest and truthful depiction of the sleeping-dreaming state.

Sundin has also spoken of his aim to create a grey canvas of sound that turns out to be packed with detail as you move closer to it; he's also achieved that here with this gently swirling and sumptuous piece of sound-scaping. I think what makes this one so successful is the undoubted presence of the human voices at its root, no matter how processed or distorted these recordings may be; it makes the piece warmer. It was also a good idea to exclude the long stretches of 'silent' tracts; I personally hope this strategy is now generally on the wane, after so many recordings that have been issued in recent years showing the baleful influence of F López. Besides, if you want a real antidote to all that silence, you'll be rewarded as you reach the second half of the disc and find an amazing slowed-down crushing metal-coil sound which, given a bit more weight in the bottom-end department, could easily run a steamroller over 90% of recent stoner rock LPs. Inside the black sleeve, you'll find a gallery of drawings by Sundin depicting Swedish royals and aristocrats who have been associated with the art of alchemy; a most fitting dramatis personae for the sonic drama unfolding on the record. Made in Malmö in 2005, with help of Swedish Arts Council money, and mastered by John Hegre. A great one!

ED PINSENT 28/08/2006

www.komplott.com

Valerio Tricoli

Metaprogramming From Within The Eye of the Storm

ITALY BOWINDO BW08 CD (2006)

Excellent 'sonic enigma' of minimalism, silence, and vivid samples from Mr Tricoli; each element is fragmented, compacted, and carefully pieced together into a razor-sharp 35 minutes of sound. This label Bowindo has been baffling the minds and ears of Europe since its 2003-04 releases by Tricoli, Domenico Sciajno, Gert-Jan Prins, Elio Martusciello, Giuseppe Ielasi, and Renato Rinaldi (see issue 13). This release is one of the new season's batch, and I find on the whole the Bowindo crop is becoming more coherent and lyrical as it gains its own identity.

On this, you may at first mistrust the pretentious and lengthy title of it, but lend your ears (preferably assisted by headphones) and be amazed by these splintered micro-events which Tricoli tosses like well-aimed darts, the astonishing clarity and volume of the digital recording, and the sheer wonder and mystery involved in the enterprise as he moves freely among these shattered sonic diamonds, perceiving a universe in every gleaming facet. From deep moans to sharp rattles and clattering, to highly-amplified breaths and pins dropping like steel girders, our ears will run the full gamut of scale and size. Long droning sounds, rattles of metallic objects. Distant voices in a room; we're fifty feet away from something happening behind us, then suddenly we're up-close against something physical whose nature we can't even begin to imagine.

Tricoli exhibits mastery of his sources, craft in their capture and recording, precision in their selection, and great compression in their organisation. Sounds don't just start and cut-off, but they have beginnings, middles and ends; and their placement in a highly-abstracted sound map has been very carefully considered. He's done all this with such deliberation that I wonder if he made use of a catalogue to help him. A truly sublime statement which I recommend. Listeners who enjoy the work of Michael J Schumacher (the NY sound artist) will also love this. Mind you, that's exactly what I wrote about Tricoli last time too!

ED PINSENT 06/08/2006

www.bowindorecordings.com

Mattin / Malfatti

Going Fragile

USA FORMED RECORDS 103 CD (2006)

Radu Malfatti's a veteran trombone improviser, Mattin the Spanish computer guy. Here's the rematch between these two, a follow-up to 2003's *Whitenoise for trombone and computer feedback*, which came out on Mattin's own label. This release is even more minimal than that bout. Ostensibly I suppose it's a showcase of sorts for the extremely radical trombone work of Radu Malfatti. Yet in the finished work, virtually all traces of any human interaction between the player and his instrument have been wiped clean, mercilessly, leaving only a faint trace of residual activity; low humming, breathing patterns, and occasional metallic clicks. Mattin meanwhile (who presumably did the editing in his computer) is also providing computer feedback. It's all minimalist to the point of being virtually empty, and naturally it's an extremely testing job to listen to it.

Two half-hour cuts, of which the first (recorded in Vienna in 2005) is the more difficult to negotiate. Statistically, about 50% of it is silence or nearly silence, with some occasional relief from the void in the shape of processed sound – which itself is excessively quiet, and extremely

slow to develop. This process is described as 'stringing incidents of sound along a long axis of time'. The second cut, recorded but a few days later, has marginally more 'clicking' activity going on to keep you entertained, and a vague texture which you can just about make out; the aural equivalent of examining the grain of a piece of white cartridge paper. Tough work!

The sleeve of the CD is covered with plenty of provocative texts vis-à-vis improvised music, fine art, politics, life, risk-taking, dangers, and so forth, including quotes from Radu himself, quite clearly rather bored and coming to the end of his tether. Bu which I mean he seems to reached the point where he no longer cares if anyone's even listening to what he does. Well, the meaning I can glean from these printed texts is that it's come to the point where he has to start pushing the audience around, trying out new things, testing his own limits, and ours. Additional texts from chip-on-shoulder Mattin, some of which will apparently feature in his forthcoming book on this subject, also embody this kind of head-on and slightly confrontational approach to foisting difficult art on the eyes and ears of the crowd.

If you're a supporter of this kind of music, you may find it's hard to argue with some aspects of Mattin's standpoint, but at the same time his line of reasoning seems rather facile to me. I suspect it's because he's only telling one side of the story; the value of art is not to be measured by the difficulty of its relationship to the audience, and nothing else. Yet it seems this is precisely where Mattin and Malfatti want the point of engagement to begin. It seems to come down to one concept: 'people don't like new things. People don't like our music. Therefore our music must be good...' A wholly fallacious argument if ever there was, and a line of thought often used by bogus modernist painters who keep citing the initial 'unpopularity' of painters from the Post-Impressionist school. To be honest, I also find the same sort of intellectual glibness pervades much of this quiet, reduced and blank music that's been spreading around for the last few years; if it's really so radical and challenging as all that, why are so many people apparently finding it so easy to create, and in such significant quantities? And don't get me started on Francisco López...Anyway, these are simply notes for a longer discussion which we must have some time.

ED PINSENT 13/08/2006

www.formedrecords.com
www.mattin.org

Anthony Guerra / Matt Earle

In

SLOVENIA L'INNOMABLE NO NUMBER CD (2005)

A striking set of severe minimal electronic improvisations. On the second cut, the duo find a groove so solid they stick with it for 22 minutes, yet how this can be done given such slender and insubstantial material is something of an achievement. It's little more than an intense floating mist of feedback filled with glitchy snowflakes. This work takes the no-input mixing desk approach and tempers it slightly with light washes of digital texture. Somehow, its apparent aimlessness is actually filled with electrifying tension, and its gradual development can aid concentration on simple tasks. I would recommend that you play it at work when no-one is watching. Or else take it home, play it loud, and fill your living room with interactive, installation-styled, aural art. Recorded in Sydney 2003-04.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2006

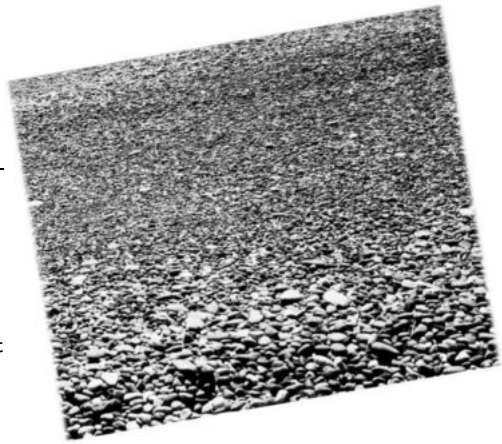
www.linnomable.com

Martin Küchen

Music from one of the provinces of the empire

UK CONFRONT COLLECTORS SERIES CCS3 CD (2004)

Nifty solo CD of puffy improv by Martin sticking alto and soprano saxes into his big breathing gob. He rarely does much more than just exhale and inhale into the tubes of these obscene instruments, controlling his airflow patterns in a very structured way. He is thus another of the growing band of 'Blowing Billies' who likewise forego such niceties as fingering or playing tunes, and prefer to reduce their expensive musical instruments to the status of metal tubes with which to amplify and vary the sound of their own inner pulmonary system (for example Rives, Bosetti, Dörner and Kelly). But Marty K, the man with the brain that just doesn't quit and a set of lungs to match, also adds some great effects all of his own: overtones, harmonics, whispering melodies (almost), rattling, and best of all the animalistic grunting noises, which he vomits out much like a big sick hog. These bestial eructations are about the best of their kind in this limited field – the best his rival



Alessandro Bosetti can manage is an imitation of a slightly depressed guinea-pig. But then Küchen also does gargling (rolling gobbets of his own saliva around the bell) and clacking (moving his fingers around the keys, but studiously avoiding playing anything like a recognisable note). And then suddenly he lets rip with inert, primitive hoots much like a 15th century cowherd stuck in the pasture blowing into Bossie's ear with an old tin horn. Plus there's the complex water sounds on track 8. What variety. Certainly this CD lives up to its title, accurately describing all manifestations of human and animal life in the empirical province. Recorded in 2004 at the Fylkingen HQ in Stockholm; issued as part of Mark Wastell's Confront series in a clamshell case, and not as 'reduced' as some other records in that series.

ED PINSENT 19/07/2006

www.martinkuchen.com

Jeph Jerman

Lithiary

USA FARGONE RECORDS FAR 035 CDR (2005)

What's this – a recording of an invasion of our shores by 10,000 land crabs? No, it's merely the new 'stoner' CDR by mystery-man Jeph Jerman, that roaming outsider of Arizona. Cover picture shows a huge pebble beach. If legends are believable, let's hope he didn't stop working until he'd 'played' every single stone on that beach. Or at least he kept looking for days on end until he found the 'right' stone. Seven of the 'right' stones are pictured inside, so he clearly had some success. It took him at least three months to realise the task, so I'll believe anything. Imagine this gently clacking sound going on for three thousand years – and you'll immediately have some idea of what it was like to be around during the Cenozoic era. This man Jerman is a completely 'natural' genius, forsaking anything to do with conventional music production, and instead revealing the sumptuous mysteries of God's creation through his patient, humble, and totally transparent art of persistence and simplicity, fully engaging with the objects in the world around him. 100 copies exist of this 46-minute episode of rumbling and rattling brilliance.

ED PINSENT 30/08/2006

www.fargonerecords.com

Touch25

1981/2 — 2006/7 +

2006:

Touch
Rosy Parlane, Jessamine [TO:68]
Chris Watson ¬ BJNilsen, Storm [Tone 27]
Touch 25 [Tone 25]
Oren Ambarchi, Suspension [T33.18 reissue]
Ryoji Ikeda, +/- [TO:30 reissue]
Jacob Kirkegaard, 4 Rooms [Tone 26]
Phill Niblock, Touch Three [TO:68]
Biosphere, dropsonde [TO:66CD/LP]

Ash International
Geir Jenssen, Cho Oyu 8201m – Field Recordings from Tibet [Ash 7.1]
Alvars Orkester, Interference [Ash 6.9]
The Ghost Orchid, An Introduction to EVP [PARC CD1 new version]

OR
Gescom, Minidisc [only3cd]

2007:

KK NULL, Fertile [TO:74]
Touch 25 Live 3CD Box [Tone 29]
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THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTY

Improvised Music played by Improvisers (some of it rather quietly)

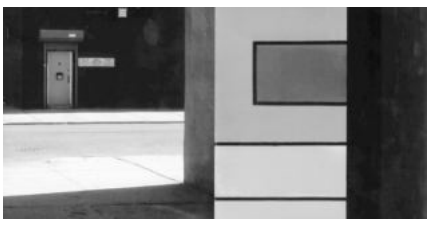
Keith Rowe / Toshimaru Nakamura

between

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 050-2 2 x CD (2006)

A new double disc by this duo of improvising stars, on the Erstwhile label, with Rowe cover paintings. Their last outing as a duo was *Weather Sky*, also on Erstwhile, and that exceptional release shone as beautifully as a bright star in the night. This one does likewise, although compared with that predecessor's tightness and compaction, it might appear somewhat more diffuse, and it contains plenty of variety within the generally quiet, minimal and static fields of electronic sound. In particular, you can hear the fine detail of such micro-events as Rowe bonking his digits against the sensitive and highly-amplified strings of his table guitar set-up, causing a semi-musical knocking sound; and someone audibly adjusting the control knob of a delay pedal while processed sound is still pouring out, varying the vibrational effects as they happen, in real time. Throughout it all Toshimaru can be heard seething with his usual slow-burn constrained packets of feedback spiralling outwards from his no-input mixing board, releasing compacted energy slowly into the atmosphere like a gigantic electric elephant breathing its last. Quiet power is still power, though; there's enough energy here to demolish three hundred unwanted mobile telephone masts.

There's about two hours of music here over five tracks, mostly recorded during 2005 in a studio in Vienna, although the long 41:00 cut was performed in a theatre in Lausanne. '13630 kHz' is the lively opener to disc two, and shows the pair cutting up a bit rougher and noisier than they do for most of disc one, which is a delirious and sun-drenched trip to dreamland – slow, meditational, vibrating and almost soporific. However, as noted with other recent examples of this sort of music, I think the ultra-quiet and ultra-minimal zones of the *Amplify 02* box set (on which both Rowe and Toshi featured prominently) are already behind us. For sheer dynamics – admittedly very subtly achieved dynamics – the long 'Lausanne' track is the star of this set, a document of a highly sympathetic meeting of spirits, busily weaving a shape-shifting carpet of hums, buzzes, and whirrs, now and then embellished with fragments of voice and music from short-wave radio.



The cover paintings and photographs depict commonplace urban zones where nothing much seems to be happening – they bring to mind certain hyper-realist painters of the 1970s, some of whom meticulously copied photographs deliberately chosen for their banality, their lack of anything usually regarded as an 'event'. Yet they found and showed aesthetic delight in the fall of shadows and light on these deserted streets and empty municipal parks. In like manner, both music and art on *between* invites us to enter these apparently 'vacant' realms and explore the micro-surface. We are between stations as it were, on the way from one place to another; it's these often-overlooked interstices of life, thought and action that Rowe and Nakamura are interested in.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2006

www.erstwhilerecords.com

4g

Cloud

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS

ERSTWHILE 046-2 2 x CD (2005)

Keith Rowe has recorded before with all of these players, although not in this combination; with Toshimaru Nakamura, he made the unforgettable *Weather Sky*; with Christian Fennesz, the deliriously impressive *Live at the LU*; and with Oren Ambarchi he made the below-average *Honey Pie* for the Grob label in 2004. But what an inspired idea for all four players to team up (particularly interesting to bring in Oren after his escapades with Sunn O))), the kings of low-frequency low-end amplifier noise). Dubbing themselves 'Four Gentlemen of the Guitar', as though they were a team of villains fit for doing battle with Sherlock Holmes or even Batman (I'm thinking of the *Four Villains of Doom*), the quartet come roaring out proudly with not one but two lengthy discs of inspired guitar-based improvised music; although of course there are other sonic elements much in evidence, including live electronics, live processing, laptop processing, amplifier hum, feedback and shortwave radio fragments from good old Rowe. They did it at French and Canadian music festivals in 2004; the recording quality is staggeringly good, bringing the sort of intimacy you could only expect if you were seated right in the middle of their collective table-top setups. And all the music they made is just utterly astounding.

At times in the bewitching, slow-moving tapestries, it's sometimes possible to discern the work of each individual player. 'Perfect Grass' is one such showcase, highlighting good things from each of the strumming axemen as they

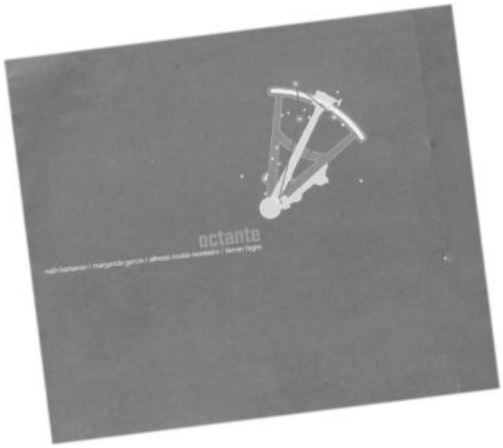
enter their meditative and respectful trances. There's the slow and hissy feedback of Toshimaru, and the familiar heavy 'plunks' from Oren Ambarchi, as though each string on his axe were made of uranium coated with lead which he has to pluck from a distance of 18 feet with special tongs. There's the soaring drone of Fennesz as he uses keystrokes and mouse to sublimate each guitar chord into an airy semi-resolved psychedelic cloud. And at the centre of this astral omniverse, there's the monumental majesty of Keith Rowe, sitting among the stars like a gigantic Jupiter so confident in his power that he no longer feels any need to hurl vengeful thunderbolts at upstart mortals below. The divine choir sample that closes this piece may be leaking from his shortwave radio, or may be a visiting chorus of angels paying homage to this Olympian titan of the deconstructed table-top guitar. 'Perfect Grass' (which title may be construed as the comment of a satisfied hippie drawing a good 'toke' on a 'reefer', or that of a proud farmer surveying his meadows) is among the most sweetly musical of the offerings on the set.

'Deformed Veil' may start with the theme of the 'long black veil' in that American folk song of a devoted widow but as title suggests, that semi-supernatural story needs updating for the stripped-down 21st century, the age of speed-dating and instant divorces. So, deform the veil they must. It's 38 minutes of minimal aggression, and hearing it is like being wrestled to the ground by powerful angry midgets. The most harsh and prickly of the abstractions on this collection, it contains strange swoopings (which I can only attribute to the tautly-controlled arm movements of the players, making motions like ospreys or ptarmigans with their string-plucking wings); electronic crackles, portioned out by the tonne with mechanised scoops; and solar winds, measured in decibels and fit to turn an orange windsock inside-out. I have no conception of how the latter effect may have been achieved, but it all adds to the bleak mood of concentrated grimness. Yet the hatred pouring from the knotted brows of the four gentlemen eventually eases off and the piece turns into a vapourous field of near-silence, one of many 'Clouds' indicated by the CD title. Yet in this silence, everything is clearly full of audible concentration and the usual intensity; even when apparently doing very little, these four lumberjacks are working every minute – listening, thinking, deciding, their musical muscles rippling like a weight-lifter about to risk another hernia as he tries for the 300kg barbell. Sweat glistens on foreheads; yours included.

The second disc is one piece, just a single hour of glorious, slow and rich beauty, about as layered as a fruit and chocolate trifle from a Polish restaurant where chocolate is unknown. Here, even though it begins with Oren's 12-foot long plucks suspended in a fizzy backdrop which may emanate from Toshi's wooden fret-box of monkeyshines and mystery cards, it's harder than before to spot the individual players; they merge into one. The one thing they merge into is a many-faced mythical creature, much like the possessed outcast in the New Testament who told Jesus 'My name is Legion, for we are many.' The work solidifies into an ocean-deep zero-gravity free-fall depiction of enormous cosmic space, variety and wonderment. The heavenly choir makes another appearance, this time manifesting more subtly than before, a ghost of its former self; angels of angels, singing faint traces of eternal hymns. How can so much abstract fizzing, crackle, and low-frequency humming amount to such gorgeous music? As to this colossal stack of evidence of radical reuse and repurposings of the electric guitar, well...Les Paul himself doffs his hat in tribute from that old Gibson factory in the sky. This is a radio broadcast from Heaven. Not given to hyperbole, I'll state this is one of the best Erstwhiles ever released. Heck, probably one of the best improvised records ever made.

ED PINSENT 18/07/2006

www.erstwhilerecords.com



Ruth Barberán / Margarida Garcia / Ferran Fages / Alfredo Costa Monteiro

Octante

SLOVENIA L'INNOMABLE NO NUMBER CD (2005)

A great one this – a true Spanish bullfight of abstract improvised noise! I recall the core trio (two of whom are Cremaster, the harsh electronic madmen) making a record called *Atolón* for Rossbin in 2004, which was about the driest, emptiest piece of rattling acoustical improvisation I'd ever heard up to that point. They did it with an empty hand-cranked turntable and an accordion that wheezed tunelessly. Here, they improve on that basic model, bringing a fourth member (Margarida Garcia on bass guitar) to the team, and adding more verve, elan and sheer violence to their actions until they resemble mad builders in a dusty maisonette ripping up old floorboards which issue many a creak of complaint. Sadly, no empty turntable was brought into the studio this time, but overall I'm glad to note what appears to be a move away from the extremely quiet and reduced form of playing. There's still a basic inertness in the sounds they work with, but they transcend that through sheer blood-letting in their 'slaughterhouse' styled movements, all flailing arms and twitching fingers. Ruth Barberán blows a trumpet, tearing gashes in the steely air around her; Ferran Fages attaches a pick-up to anything that moves, and strives to direct any resulting feedback and noise with a mixing board. Alfredo Costa Moneiro continues to wreak silent violence and death with his assassin's accordion. Recorded in a single day in 2003; this Slovenian label L'Innomable is another hopeful small label seemingly dedicated to documenting quiet improv, and owner Luka Zagoricnik may be trying to fill the void left by the departure of Michel Henritzi's A Bruit Secret label. *Octante*, title of this one, and graphic of said device on the cover, suggests the quartet are star-gazing navigators on board a three-masted man-o-war; you can certainly hear the timbers of the hull creaking on this release!

ED PINSENT 08/07/2006

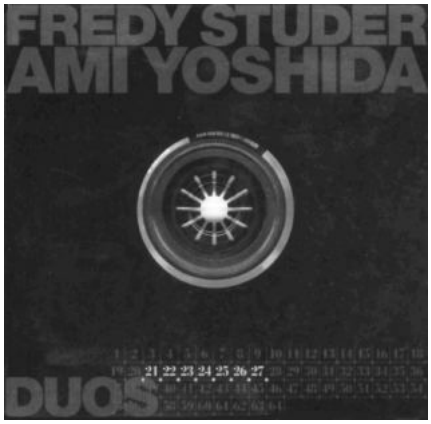
www.linnomable.com

Fredy Studer / Ami Yoshida

Duos 21-27

SWITZERLAND FOR4EARS CD 1656 CD (2005)

European and Japanese improvisers meet up for this episode, seven tracks resulting from a 2004 date for Swiss radio and recorded in a studio in Zurich. I was all set to take sides and champion the Japanese half of the act, but it's an excellent collaborative collection and the duo work together perfectly; Yoshida's unique vocal mannerisms are brilliantly showcased by the minimal and unobtrusive (but still strangely rich) percussion work of Studer. He does it mostly with metal and cymbals, deploying slow and deliberative movements with his arms, and



making his kit of oddments drone and growl in a quite menacing way. Ami Yoshida continues to pull out internal shapes from the deepest part of her body and soul. Somehow it's inadequate to say she's simply a vocalist, as these highly personal sounds seem to be wrenched from her very fibre of being. At their best, for example on 'Duo 24', the pair reach a joint level of concentration and mesmerising intensity which few improvisers can match. At worst, you still have a CD with a very engaging and sympathetic combination of well-matched sound worlds. I'm also struck that 4 of the 7 tracks are quite short; either this pair reached the desired communication junctions very swiftly, or the producers (Studer, Günter Müller and Esther Heeb) are just presenting us with the choicest moments from the sesh. Either way this is a refreshing change from the overlong 'document-everything' approach you sometimes find in this area.

ED PINSENT 08/07/2006

g.mueller@eblcom.ch
www.for4ears.com

David Leahy

Finger Painting

UK DAFMUSIC 0601 CD (2006)

Never one of the most obvious choices of instrument with which to record a solo album, the double bass is nevertheless the cross of choice for New Zealander David Leahy, just one of several Antipodeans resident in the U.K. Although classically trained, Leahy seems to have rapidly assimilated the murky world of Jazz. And if he hasn't moved beyond that world altogether, he has at least incorporated numerous other elements into his music. This is a self-release, and to be fair, it's not all subsonic frequencies, Leahy throwing in some impressionistic piano into the mix as well.

If some of the pieces on this CD are a little raucous and loose, something Leahy certainly wouldn't be ashamed of, it is for the most part a good-natured, almost unusually melodic affair (sad but true in these bleak days of bleepy, electronic minimal everything and people who go out of their way to make their instruments sound like everything except what they are). It's also true that Leahy is not afraid to disguise the Jazz elements of his playing. He cites amongst his many influences Blue Note maverick Andrew Hill, and much of the work here gives at least a respectful nod to a post-Love Supreme soundscape.

With his taste for unusual dress, seemingly permanently optimistic attitude, and firm belief in the kinaesthetic, Leahy reminds one more than a little of fellow-New Zealander and former U.K. resident, experimental film maker Len Lye. Indeed, apart from being involved with the London Improvisers Orchestra, Leahy also spends a good deal of time on the city's contemporary dance scene, both as musician and dancer. If his music lacks the sheer intensity of a fellow board-treader like Cecil Taylor, it does have a lightness of spirit that is rare in the often depressingly post-modern world in which we live.

AARON ROBERTSON

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Tetuzi Akiyama
Striking Another Match
USA UTECH RECORDS 027 CD (2006)

In which Akiyama, that cutting-edge extreme Japanese experimenter of the guitar, cuts loose, surprises all expectations, and 'does a John Fahey' in extremely convincing fashion. He did it one light at Loop Line in Tokyo. Someone made an audience recording, and the results end up on Utech Records. Other releases were sent to the magazine, which I found disappointing, and all of them arrived in this zero-effort packaging, so elegantly minimal in rising above its no-budget status. Actually it's kind of endearing that each printed artwork is about the size of a visiting card, inserted into a diaphanous bag with the CDR, leaving the reader and listener hungry for more information.

On *Striking Another Match*, Tetuzi plays a mean acoustic guitar and makes generous use of gorgeous US-folk influenced chords, tunes, and guitar-picking methods to match anything recorded by Stefan Grossman, and thus entertains listeners for one solid hour with his ripple-picking, harmonics, hammering-on, and

precision fingering. If you'd been in the audience you'd have been pretty much spellbound by this avant-garde take on the music of Mississippi John Hurt (and while we're on this subject, am I the only one to find Jack Rose's take on Hurt extremely disappointing?). Fans of Jerry Garcia, Jorma Kaukonen, Bert Jansch, Leo Kotke, and John Fahey should probably seek this obscurity out with some despatch. Akiyama displays total mastery of this instrument, and every tune he plays is full of invention.

The other interesting thing is from this record you can sorta tell (almost instantly) that the musician is not an American, despite the skill and conviction with which he plays. Folk music it ain't; this isn't his native tradition , nor something in his blood and bones. Everything you hear has been painstakingly *learned*, most probably from gramophone records, and is delivered with the precision of someone who can't afford to make a single mistake in their delivery. Of course it's also very interesting for this reason, I might add. Less than crystal-clear recording quality, sadly. Also sourced from an unedited tape (with lots of stage chat, causing many a lull in the excitement level), and no index points on the finished CD. Almost a bootleg quality release, yet the music shines. Oh, there's some songs too...and around the 20:00 mark, Akiyama does start to get slightly more 'atonal' in his overall approach, as though all that preceding melodic work needed to be cancelled out by some dissonant avant-noise in order to preserve his own mental health. It's a weird, uneven release, frankly, but also a lovely one.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2006

www.utechrecords.com

Broken Hands / Lucky Rabbit
Lucky Hands
UK TWOTHOUSANDAND 2+11 CD (2005)

A showdown of sorts between two duos drawn from the London improv scene's younger generation of contributors: Lucky Rabbit, comprised of altoist Seymour Wright and guitarist Ross Lambert; and Broken Hands, the work of American Michael Rodgers and Australian Anthony Guerra, both on guitar and the two founders of the Twothousandand label on which this CD appears. This is a 2003 recording done live to air on London's estimable Resonance FM, scene of many of such happy occasions for the London improv community.

The pedigree of all concerned is as pure as fresh winter snow, all passing under the wings of such kings of quiet improvisation as Eddie Prevost, and performing with various members of the Japanese Off-site community (Wright being a former resident of Tokyo, Guerra a current one if my information is correct). This, combined with the intimate surroundings of the Resonance studio add up to make the music an understated affair. The CD sees the members of both groups face off in various mathematical combinations, Lucky Rabbit's contribution, as has been remarked elsewhere does have an air of early Zorn, the two guitars of Broken Hands plucking away in a quietly melodic way, rather unlike your typical European improviser. Perhaps the best track here is the final quartet when both groups come together in the spirit of understanding for a final blow before bedtime, if anything cut abruptly short.

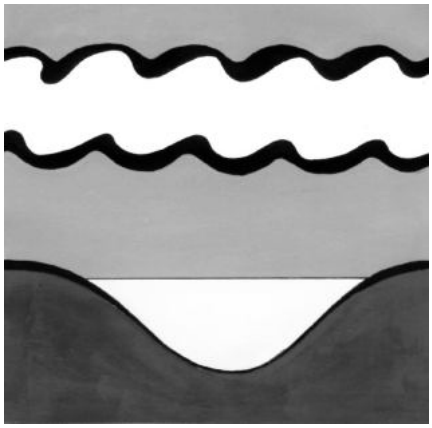
If one has a sustained criticism it would be that the music on occasion appears to veer off into unrestrained noodling, lacking any determined sense of direction, and it's true that the same could be said for much of what makes up the often-murky world of free improv. Still, this does in places, notably the Broken Hands contributions, give the music an ethereal quality that is not entirely unpleasant. The CD hits no remarkable highs nor anything like the lowest of the lows, but is content to quietly chart a middle ground of improvisation, that despite the New world contributions make it sound remarkably 'English' in character.

AARON ROBERTSON

info@twothousandand.com
www.twothousandand.com

Tomas Korber / Keith Rowe / Günter Müller
Fibre
SWITZERLAND FOR4EARS CD 1657 CD (2005)

A great example of the 'slow and droning' digital and amplified improv that we tend to associate with these players, this fine disc grabs you right at the start and effectively holds you in its hypnotic trance all the way through. The three mesmerists will lead you down a long, infinite corridor of slowly-shifting images (or abstract colour-field paintings, if you prefer), all dancing to the same pulsating rhythm like an etherised slowed-down heartbeat. After their successful appearances together on Jon Abbey's *Amplify02* box set, one might say that one of the best 'foils' for Rowe's omnipresent guitar and amplifier hum is the digital work of Müller, a man who



consistently proves himself to be a most accommodating all-rounder in a collaborative situation. Tomas Korber also plays guitar with live electronics and transforms himself into the third of these three rare crows who caw to one another in the dawn. They generate an electric rainstorm outside your house which resolves into harmonious, droning, dreamy layers. Only the slightly grittier third track, with its noisy 'sproings' at the opening, threatens to break the spell. This is about the only false note I can find in this otherwise excellent and sumptuous piece of somnolent music, that'll do you more good than a big dose of opium. Recorded in Geneva late 2004, with a simple cover painting (by Rowe) of a yellow lake in a red valley under a blue sky and a white cloud. Looks like a nice place to stay.

ED PINSENT 20/08/2006

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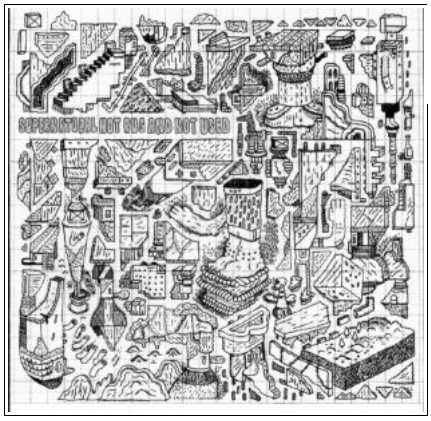

Tim Olive / Bunsho Nisikawa

Supernatural Hot Rug and Not Used

JAPAN EM RECORDS EM1055CD (2006)

The latest team effort from this improvising Canadian-Japanese duo, last heard to impressive effect on Gule Disk 001. This one is a fantastic and puzzling CD, bearing little or no resemblance to that earlier release…mysterious clunky, metallic, rubbery and squishy noises squirm around like tiny serpents on a floor of coconut matting, while helpless farmers try and pin them down with bamboo canes. Hard to believe that this range of extremely unusual and unfamiliar sounds is being made simply with one electric guitar and one electric bass. But knowing this pair and their love of deconstructing familiar instruments, or supplementing them with little pieces of junk like wooden sticks or ping-pong balls, perhaps we need not be surprised. With Olive, when we speak of a 'tabletop guitar', it's more likely to be just a lump of wood loosely threaded with arrant strings and two batteries, strewn all over his lap or other convenient surface, in splendid disarray. Truly experimental, these musical conversations defy common sense; the duo keep on exploring all the time, refusing much of the ideological baggage that blighted improv for Company and Incus and many others for so long. Eight tracks of bewildering hard-soft opacity recorded in Osaka, wrapped with an intricate Marc Bell cartoon cover, and issued on an amazing Japanese label that offers plenty other obscure goodies in the reissue section of its catalogue.

ED PINSENT 22/10/2006

www.emrecords.net

brekekekexkoaxkoax

We used to be such good friends

USA HUSHROOM RECORDS HUSHROOM 4 CD (2006)

Very nice...a relaxed and offbeat, quirkily charming set of four improvisations performed by Josh Ronsen and his friends, an Austin-based collective, and with some post-production editing by Josh. First piece features some gorgeous acoustic woodwinds – Jacob Green on the oboe, Genevieve Walsh on the flute, accompanied by guitars, organ and other instruments...it's a long opener this one, and not without a few unfortunate lulls during which all concerned seem a little uncertain about what to do next; but at best, the combo playing is simply uncanny, producing a truly magical consonance out of strange voices. The 'lull' pitfall is one that awaits any improviser and may be compounded in a group situation; but the payoff in this case shows how the rewards of improvisation can reap major dividends. This combo create a combined sound of which I've not heard the like.

On 'Tuesday on Sunday' Green and Ronsen are joined by Vanessa Arn with her live electronics set-up and Bill Thompson on the computer, to create a uniquely Texan home-grown electro-acoustic mix that is, at times, quite fabulous; everyone playing is totally full-on, in a very quiet, studious and concentrated way. This is an interesting American take on styles already developed in Japan and certain parts of Europe (Cologne and Vienna spring to mind). The final track, an example of 'conceptual sound organisation', has Ronsen bowing the bass guitar in a solo piece, and achieving an effect that Organum or Iancu Dumitrescu would not be ashamed of. When treated correctly, the bass guitar can and will resonate your rib-cage in stimulating and exciting ways, as happens here. A strong and beguiling set of performances, all slow, all quite beautiful...it's not so deep as a well, nor as the music of AMM, but you're getting warm.

ED PINSENT 08/08/2006

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ASK

Acoustic Quartet 2006

UK DISCUS 27CD CD (2006)

From the industrial north comes this album of virtuosic free-improv from Martin Archer and Co. Schooled in the way of the saxophone, he has in later years also taken up the challenge laid down by our technological age and turned to various bits of electronic wizardry to enhance his reputation further still. Here however he is found, as the name implies, in the company of some other old-time pickers who he's rustled up to play at a regular evening hosted the man himself at The Red Deer in Sheffield, this being a live recording of said evening's performance.

It's actually a varied set, and unusually for European improv not afraid to betray influences, or sound remotely accessible. Interestingly at times it sounds almost a little, dare I say it, jazz. Courtesy of the cool vibe sounds of Charlie Collins it's easy to make a comparison to Eric Dolphy's twisted masterpiece *Out to Lunch*, and later on Archer seems at one point to be deliberately quoting from the end section of *A Love Supreme*. Still later, there is even a Masada-like section which Zorn himself would surely be proud of. All of which makes it entirely more listenable than I thought it would be before I gave it a spin.

If I do have one pet peeve it's the wish that Artists of all description would actually bother to give titles to the work they produce. I mean for God's sake, why should I care about your work when you can't be bothered to finish it!? With all five pieces here being given the rather imaginative name 'Untitled Improvisation', boy were my hackles up! This small oversight for me tainted slightly an otherwise interesting album, in itself something I'm not moved to say often about free improv nowadays. Hell man, use the I-Ching, roll a dice, anything!

AARON ROBERTSON

www.discus-music.co.uk

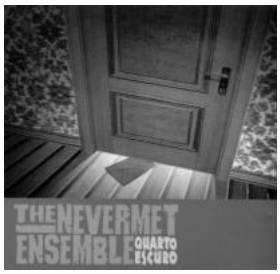
The Nevermet Ensemble

Quarto Escuro

PORTUGAL RUDIMENTOL RECORDS RUD003 CD (2005)

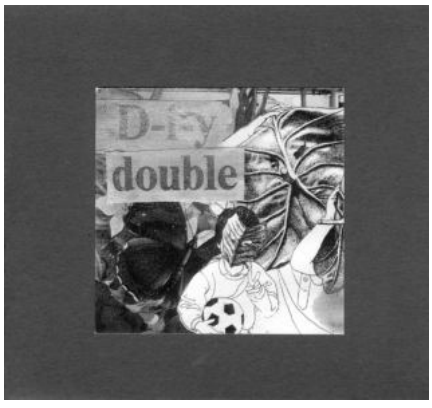
On the face of it, this is the ideal concept for our isolationist times: take a bunch of musicians living in different countries who don't know each other and get them to send in various examples of their disparate sonic signatures to a central mastermind who whips the lot into a work of great subtlety and depth, thereby achieving fame and renown for all concerned. In reality things are bound to work out somewhat differently, the minutiae of everyday life detourning what is nowadays an entirely feasible proposition.

The musicians involved hail from varying parts of the globe: Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, but also Japan and the USA, are all represented in this evil commune of sound. The mastermind in question is Miguel Cabral, also the mastermind behind the Rudimentol label. The resulting pieces on the CD, it has to be said, succeed to varying degrees. At its best the music rapidly chops and changes between elements of abstract noise and improvisation, and fairly regular melodies and rhythms, creating quite an intriguing, soundtrack-like, texture of sound. At worst the pieces sound like what they are comprised of: separate elements bearing little or no relation to each other that have been bundled together in the hope of creating something greater than the sum of parts, which never quite seems to eventuate.



The title, *Quarto Escuro* translates from Cabral's native Portuguese as 'Dark Room', and is the name of a children's game in Portugal where participants try to identify each other using touch only. So, an apt title for the CD (and a slight cause for concern for the mental health of Portuguese adolescents, who perhaps graduate to 'Quarto Luz Vermehlo') one thinks. Cabral has managed to conjure up from the raw material at his disposal an atmosphere of cartoon darkness that is slightly creepy, and yet rather intriguing at the same time. As befits the whole idea there is even a hidden bonus track thrown in at the end.

AARON ROBERTSON



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Anthony Guerra / Nishide Takehiro

Scopa Possibilities

UK TWOTHOUSANDAND 2+12 CD (2005)

Another release from the quietly prolific Anthony Guerra and Co., this one with Nishide Takehiro, like Guerra formally resident in London but who, again like Guerra, has since returned to his native land. The CD presents a very ghost-like world of sound indeed. Things don't so much explode out of the silence as this duo might have us believe but instead gradually appear from the nothingness: sputtering crackles, high frequencies, and low-level guitar drones are all used in an attempt to conjure up what could be taken to be a manifesto of sorts.

That oft-repeated cry of desperate musicians everywhere, 'fix it in the mix', has apparently been upgraded in this digital day and age to 'fix it in the mastering' which doesn't really have the same ring to it, or the same romantic visions of burning the midnight oil in smoky control rooms. Still, that seems to be exactly what is attempted here, in some sort of belated effort by these two to try and salvage what they could from the recordings. Of course, with apparently not much material to try and salvage in the first place that must have been a horrifically complicated affair.

The album does perhaps pose an intriguing problem for the reviewer, and that is namely that there is not very much going on here at all. Should this be taken to mean that this duo has refined their means to such incredible levels of efficiency that they should be judged not by what they play but by what they chose not to play, or is the emperor rather scantily clad? I would probably opt for the latter, especially as these two seem to give themselves away in the last minutes of the recording by realising they had at least better make some sort of effort and start playing something. If only they had maintained their cunning illusion until the very end I might just have been fooled.

AARON ROBERTSON

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Thus

Tripod Mind

USA RECORDED 018 CD (2005)

Neil Feather is an American instrument inventor/performer/composer in what is now somewhat of a New World tradition: the anti-institutional visionary who decides to build his own world from the ground up. The man is hailed as a genius by some who, in a sadly familiar tale, declaim the fact that he has been building his own instruments and performing his own radical music on them for something like the last thirty years, all with very little recognition. Here Feather, with the aid of fellow compatriot John Berndt, performs using these very instruments, perhaps fittingly, live at the American Visionary Art Museum.

For all the American 'make it new' aesthetic, the music, sitting as it does firmly in the aforementioned tradition, does ironically seem to suffer from what I would call the Harry Partch Syndrome. Partch's music, the product of some densely complicated theory and undeniably fascinating instruments, never seemed to measure up to the radical promise held out by said theory or said instruments. Recording quality aside, Partch's music has always seemed to me a little bland, strangely lacking in some of the elements that make truly great music truly great. And, unfortunately, much the same criticism could be levelled at this CD.

This recording also incorporates the use of a self-designed three speaker sound system, apparently allowing some complicated gymnastics in the perceived position of instruments in the recording. Of course, not being equipped with such a system at home, instead choosing to steadfastly remain old school with my 'stereo' system, none of this acoustic panorama appears to translate in the slightest. In an interesting aside, John Berndt maintains the official website of yet another American visionary, Henry Flynt, whose recordings of updated 'folk music' also feature on the Recorded label and who is perhaps another influence on Feather's train of thought. Just don't say he was part of Fluxus!

AARON ROBERTSON

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Tetuzi Akiyama / Jason Kahn

Till We Meet Again

SWITZERLAND FOR4EARS CD 1654 CD (2005)

Not very engaging at all; meandering acoustic guitar works from the Japanese maestro, sometimes in a duo situation with the American percussionist Kahn who also plays the synth. Four duo recordings, 3 solos by Akiyama, two solos by Kahn; everything full of fiddly, illogical twisty-turny lines of thought that don't add up. The only thing I like about this record is the 'deep' sound of it, the warm presence created by the intimate recording process. Unfortunately, it's not something you want to be in the warm presence of for too long. Recorded in 2003 and 2005.

ED PINSENT 22/08/2006

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TAPE MASCHINES
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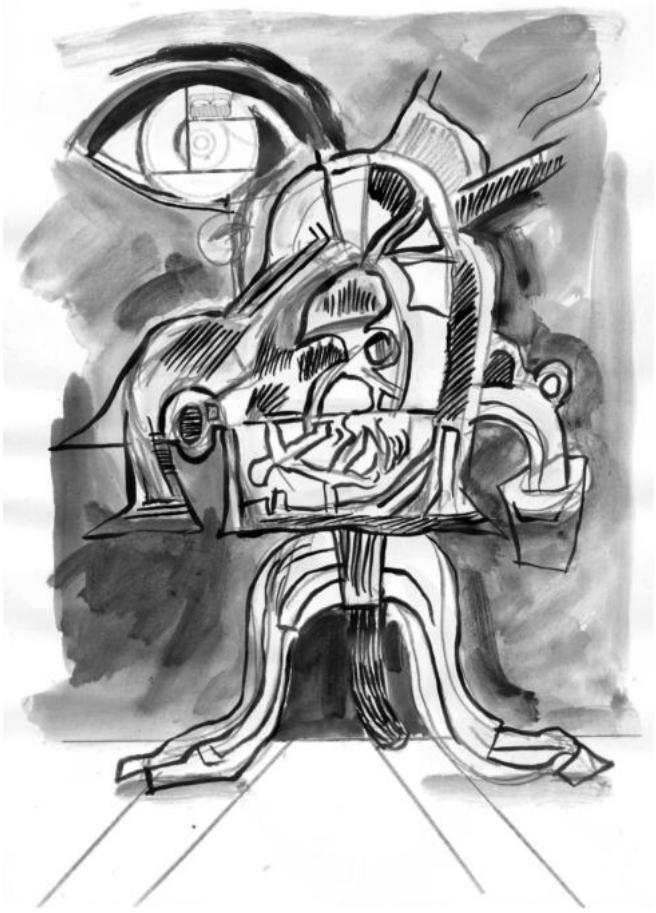
Also Turntablists and Machinists

Joe Colley and Jason Lescalleet
Brombron 09: Annihilate This Week
THE NETHERLANDS KORM PLASTICS KP 3024 CD (2006)



Terrific record of totally weird American marginal sound-art. Four tracks of about equal length (10 minutes apiece) providing quite perplexing (in a good way) droney, noisy tape constructs, each of them quite 'heavy' in varying ways – I mean their implied philosophical ruminations as much as their sheer volume in sound, layers and ponderousness. The crow-calls sampled and cut up on 'Nervous Laughter' are particularly effective, the mocking tone of these scavenging birds passing on many an existential moment where one's very existence seems called into doubt by their questing beaks. 'Prayer', which opens the collection, has some very fine enervated and neurotic electric guitar noise-work, and a splendidly contrived sound-effect narrative which suggests a listener walking down corridors, opening doors, and allowing sound events to spill out from unknown chambers lurking behind those portals. Some of these events may be forbidden, dangerous. A similar corridor effect of course has been used on Kate Bush's third LP for EMI (on the song 'All We Ever Look For'); but this only confirms what an innovator that great woman is. I'm onto track three of Colley and Lescaleet's work, feeling strongly that perhaps many aspects of the week have indeed been annihilated for me, even if this particular cut is somewhat more ordinary than the two strong openers. And yet it possesses this steely grey aura of menace that I can't shake off. All of this work was done in Nijmegen in 2005, where the two were 'locked away in the recording studio of Geluidwerkplaats Extrapool for ten days', and subsequently mixed by Colley in a mobile studio in Oakland. It seems 'they found music in the natural process of decay'. The process of annihilation they so clearly desire has been achieved by smothering, blanketing and blanking out the world around them, with thick relentless mats of dense sound-art poured out of the mental orifices like so much porridge.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2006

www.kormplastics.nl

Hans Otte
Orient:Occident / Minimum:Maximum
USA POGUS PRODUCTIONS P21037-2 CD (2005)

Two very fine constructs of European avant-tape nuttiness informed by a supremely intelligent mind. The long piece 'Minimum : Maximum' is originally from 1973, it's 41 minutes, and it's a genuine lost treasure of sound-art composition you can really get your teeth into. Using music, spoken word and sound recordings all deployed in an ingenious multi-layered composition, Otte slowly builds up an event-filled framework of controlled-sprawling insanity. Spoken-word phrases are repeated endlessly (or perhaps tape loops are used), and two organists deliver ponderous and solemn musical abstractions. The relentless repetition of the word 'Ich' is intended to cast ontological doubts on the listener's sense of ego. Could be a simultaneous performance thing going down here, as at least two locations (Bremen and Stockholm) seem to be involved. It resembles a kind of modernist, reinvented 'opera', rendered in schematic form, with all the familiar elements (like story, character and development) reduced to diagrammatic symbols and put into a wholly unrecognisable order. It builds up to a finale of sheer gibberish and out-of-control intensity, which to me is just lovely – much more true to the way things are in real life, than the way things are depicted in 99% of what passes for culture. Otte brings a real radiophonic sensibility to his compositional work (he was director of music at Radio Bremen 1959-1984), by which I mean everything from the staging, use of simultaneous 'broadcasts', editing, layering, use of tapes, and clear Cagean influences in the allowance of random overlapping events. All of which he does brilliantly. A real classic from the vaults this!

'Orient : Occident' was composed in 1977, although this recording is from 1986. Performances from oboe and clarinet were taped and remade into new sounds, new forms, and new music, utterly transforming the nature of the original instruments and quietly demonstrating a bold use of the tape recorder as a musical instrument. One extended vari-speeded passage resembles the sort of electronic sequencer pattern for which Ralf and Florian would have traded their vintage Telefunken radio sets. 14 minutes of musical / tapework delight which engages you with its beauty while simultaneously disturbing you with its deeply altered nature. This is one fine CD.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2006

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John Wall

cphon

UK UTTERPSALM CD7 CD (2006)

John Wall's seventh CD, some years after 2002's *kylic*, and continuing his personal tradition of issuing his beyond-minimal electronic music packaged in attractive and tactile letterpress sleeves in vinyl pouches. I recall *kylic* as an intensive 20-minute impacted explosion of samples, than which you couldn't get more minimal or reductive; and it seemed to be simmering with compacted anger. And yet with *cphon*, he branches outward and builds up slightly from the ground-zero of *kylic*. *Cphon* is still only 20 minutes, and it is still mostly digital abstractions, but it also has rhythm and pulse and even some recognisable piano samples. A species of music emerges, perhaps slightly grudgingly from the hands of the stern master, out of the combination of high-powered whomp sounds, the whizzing buzz-bombs, the needle-sharp clicks.

The main point of interest is the high degree of tension emanating from this CD; you'll feel taut and alert within the first 30 seconds of hearing. Said tension arises perhaps from the composer's determination to keep every statement terse, taciturn and compacted (almost to the point of abruptness), while the surface sound has a very attractive sheen and shine, as 'sumptuous' as he will allow under the very severe circumstances. *cphon* thus presents simple opposing forces, and pushes and pulls its way across your mind: beckoning you in with its silver-plated casing, while at the same time challenging you to engage with it. Five collaborators, who may have provided source material for the samples, are named on the sleeve; a further three fellows are credited with 'additional sound manipulations'. The fact that it's taken nine people so long to produce something so short makes you think of certain 'compressing' forces in nature, like vast amounts of carbon under pressure for thousands of years to create a single diamond.

The anger I mentioned, which I sense is still in evidence, may be directed by Wall at what he regards as the inanities and excesses of modern culture (and not just musical culture); he may even feel slightly constrained and frustrated by his own self-imposed disciplines and limitations. By the tough rules he's set for himself, there are several things he's not allowed to do, including revisiting areas he's already explored himself, or doing anything remotely familiar to a listener, or anything done by others elsewhere. To follow these guidelines requires a superhuman restraint; and in an age when we've made false idols out of promiscuity, excess and indulgence, I'm all for that. But you also wonder if Wall's music will ever really 'cut loose' with passion, energy or excitement as long as he keeps himself in check this way.

ED PINSENT 22/10/2006

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Crawling With Tarts

Ochre Land, Blue Blue Skies / Grand Surface Noise Opera Nr. 7

USA POGUS PRODUCTIONS P21039-2 CD (2006)

This is the Californian sound artist Michael Gendreau with two splendid long works, about 35 minutes apiece. Listen closely and be drawn into two exciting whirlpools of uniquely fascinating sound. His brand of process art aspires to arrive at the 'monolithic' through a single-minded and relentless approach, with constantly-shifting textures, and layers of additional ideas applied liberally along the way. His exact methodologies are not revealed, but involve the use of home-made devices and instruments, and use of old records / samples.

Both the works here exhibit the mechanical scrape and grind sound which I think is one of his characteristics; I'm thinking of the CD he made in 2002 for 23Five (*55 Pas de la Ligne au No 3*) which involved slowly-rotating turntables, and his obsessive documentation of surface noises generated though ill-functioning machinery. 'Ochre Land, Blue Blue Skies' was composed 1996-97, performed 1998, and forefronts instruments of his own design. Despite any mechanical origins, this work grows in a richly organic way and achieves an artificial simulation of the sound of the sea, and other natural soundscapes. It also reaches a level of manic intensity which few drone works can manage.

'Grand Surface Noise Opera Nr 7: The Decadent Opera (Rococo)' is probably one of the many operas and miniature symphonies he has composed, using old 78 records and machines with 9-volt motors. I assume this low voltage means that they don't run very effectively. Clearly this work uses vinyl sources alongside the metallic materials; the latter deliver some astonishing effects, like demented grandfather clock chimes and fascinating passages of high-volume 'rotating' sounds. The samples appear in the latter half of the work, and are very carefully deployed: starting with spoken word materials on a vaguely 'instructional' theme, such as language instruction records, how to compose business letters, dancing lessons…already it feels like we are swimming in rich layers of ambiguity. Then the music samples arrive, including kitschy pop, TV and Hollywood stuff, gradually notching up the rate to a hysterical pitch and building up the cloying atmosphere until it becomes insufferable. The low-energy motors probably contribute a lot too. This all seems to be saying something about the degenerative history of mass-media communications, and is not simply an exercise in process for its own sake. A grand work. Aided too by Suzanne Dycus-Gendreau, who co-designed the instruments, and also provided the highly distinctive artworks on the sleeve.

ED PINSENT 08/07/2006

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Éric Cordier

Breizhiselad

EREWHON CDWhON011 CD (2006)

Cordier found an old record of traditional music from French Brittany, to be precise a 1960s reissue of an old 78 rpm disc. From this found object, he spun this present work, distressing the sound of the original record with his delay pedals and sound processing devices, and mixing the resulting events together with layers of field recordings. In the finished result, he achieves a quite limpid beauty – which may not actually be quite what he wanted to do in the first place. Seems he hated the original music on that old 78, objecting primarily to the 'catechism-like vocal arrangements', though he grudgingly admits he liked the beautiful tune and the sincerity and honesty of the singers.

The original Breton record has some importance, ethnically and culturally. It was one of the first recordings that allowed the Breton language to be heard again after some years of 'persecution and censure'; in fact there seems to have been a time when the Breton language was largely considered to be obsolete. Since then, France has started a national collection in an attempt to reassess songs and culture from Brittany, and a copy of Cordier's source recording has been deposited in that collection. This seems to be saying extremely interesting about the region of Brittany and its cultural standing in France, but I still wish I understood why such singing (which quite possibly has some religious undercurrents) causes such a bad reaction in Cordier's ears. Personally, I'm enchanted by what I hear, but I probably would have liked the original

record as much as his artistic treatments of same. Is it a simple anti-Catholicism thing? Maybe not, as he sometimes allows the sound of church bells to leak into his dense mixes, thus allowing for what I consider to be some sympathetic arrangements and consonances. He's also another sound artist who kneels at the temple of process art, owning his reverence for the 'sea of cracks' on the vinyl surface of his found object. So this record might appeal to fans of Philip Jeck, although this piece is far more controlled and much more about determining the results of the finished process than Jeck, who allows more chance elements in his music. Nonetheless, it's a good one!

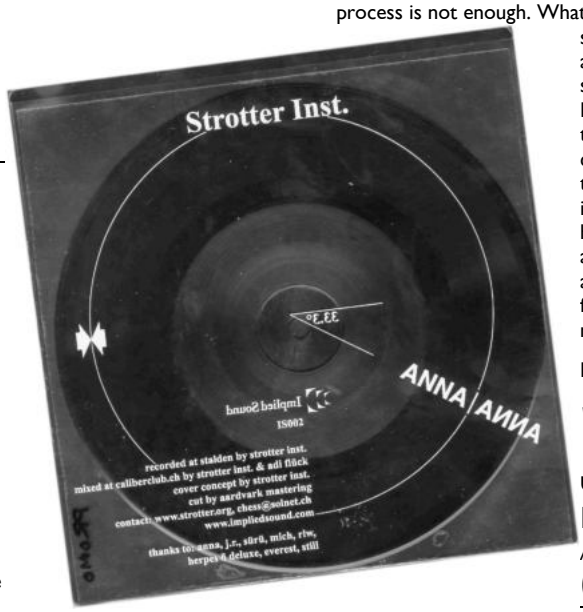
ED PINSENT 16/07/2006

http://radiantslab.com/erewhon

Strotter Inst.

Anna / Anna

USA IMPLIED SOUND IS002 7" SINGLE (2006)



The music media is abuzz with the exploits of Strotter Inst., who's reinventing the concept of art-turntabling strictly on his own terms. This is a fantastic 7-incher on black vinyl, housed in a transparent sleeve and packed with sonic delights of grinding groovery. He's a real back-to-basics, honest, greasy-handed mechanic kind of guy – you can hear real physicality in this music, and the devoted exploration of actual Newtonian processes and events. I say this to mark the stark contrast with laptop music, which has become increasingly lost in the world of the digital and the virtual. Stick this artefact on and wallow in the completely abstracted noise – scraping, scratching, stuck records, drone sounds emerging from this dark interaction between stylus and etched groove. Some musical fragments may surface from time to time, but they quickly lose their identity in this brutal structure of loops and cross-fire anti-rhythms. Indeed it's this stark quality which I think I find most enjoyable here. No need for him to sample 18 records where he can get devastating effects from two or three well-chosen seconds of sound. This stripped-down 'punk' turntabling has all the clarity and directness you'd expect from such simplicity, free from the 'baggage' often associated with spinning old vinyl artefacts from history. Already Christian Marclay and Philip Jeck, much as I love them, are starting to look like the Genesis and Pink Floyd of the genre!

Strotter Inst. is Swiss musician / architect Christoph Hess, who started this project in 1998. Recorded in St Alden and mixed with the help of Adi Flück, *Anna Anna* is a most desirable object. It but remains to mention the symmetrical construction of the entire piece. Each side of the record contains two tracks; in each case the second one is a backward-playing track, that will physically force your tonearm back towards the middle of the record. When it gets there, it will encounter a locked groove. The forwards-playing track also ends in a locked groove, so we have two locks meeting in the exact middle of the disc. The very title *Anna Anna*, itself a simple piece of concrete poetry, confirms this ingenious symmetry. Be sure to look for his 2001 LP, *Schlepper*.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2006

ww.impliedsound.com

Koji Asano

Spring Estuary

JAPAN SOLSTICE 039 CD (2005)

Charming and extremely well-crafted work from the Japanese electro-acoustic genius, who seems somehow to becoming firmly embedded in European culture. *Spring Estuary* contains three short instrumental suites and one long piece, themed on the ideas of springtime and water. One of the short pieces is a distorted loop of sound; another (track 3) is a piece of string chamber music, very likely a sample from one of his own compositions, time-stretched and transformed inside the computer to an extreme degree. The long piece may also have its origins in processed samples of acoustic music (some snatches of piano are audible), but Asano is adept at concealing his traces, and the important thing is that all four suites arrive at a similar place – wayward abstraction, complexity through digital manipulation and layering, and highly compelling results; patterns and textures of sound that are extremely pleasing to listen to. But mere process is not enough. What makes this into art is Asano's associative skills, his lyrical spirit, evoking our memories and our fleeting impressions of certain joyful sensations found in nature around Eastertide. Breezes, effects of light, scents of budding trees, fresh air, small movements of leaves, colours of flowers; Asano somehow captures the essence of these transient marvels, and invites us to explore them, into infinity. Or, in his own words: 'Water meets other water, and producing new flow. They mix, pulled apart, and comes together again as other flows, makes uncertain sound source for four music.'

ED PINSENT 12/10/2006

www.kojiasano.com

uncle e.

Deep in the Bushes

AUSTRALIA ANTBOY MUSIC 08 CD (2006)

Timothy Pledger, the Melbourne musician, composer and film-maker, appearing here under the uncle e. pseudonym which he uses when he makes electronic music; he's also in Bohjass, Bikeboy, Viaduct, and other acts famed throughout that Antipodean land. Here, he simply takes a single track from a Bohjass LP (they are an 'experimental band') and reworks selected samples from it, to produce this allegorical statement on the 'ineptitude of politics in the 21st century'. The axe which he wants to grind concerns simple greed – all taking by those in power, and no giving back to the population – and it's hard to take issue with his sentiment, simplistic though it may be.

Political statement aside, musically this is a five-star achievement – I couldn't stop listening to it. Clearly a lot of backwards-tape music (especially on part two), an effect of which I can't get my fill, but the entire work is very carefully controlled and layered, and totally composed. There's clever stating and restating of musical phrases, but not in mindless loops that go on forever or relentless barely-changing patterns, as the goddamn US Minimalists insist on doing. Instead, we have here the sort of hyper-efficient and simple ingenuity which I associate with the best work of Brian Eno. Well, just listen to what Pledger is doing with these tiny seconds of recorded woodwinds, drums, guitars and bass...you'll be impressed. His interest resides in the 'tonal and emotional aspects of rhythmic harmony as they move against each other in blocks and waves of sound.'

Not all process art, though; there's a lot of deep melancholy feeling embedded in every note, which will stir you quite profoundly and maybe get to you in the same way as the *Disintegration Loops* of William Basinksi (who used similar methods). It has a certain air of pained resignation, perhaps in the face of the massive losses and wastage which we endure daily under monopoly capitalism (I'm trying to get into the spirit of the

composer's allegory now). In that vein, the sleeve art delivers two provocative images: a Mussolini-like buffoon in a blue suit on the front cover, dancing defiantly over a stormy ocean with the flags of all nations superimposed. On the back, a man wearing shades squats in front of a flaming structure, perhaps a soldier or civilian enduring hell in any one of the current war zones which currently blight the globe. A moving statement, a great listen; another goodie on Will Guthrie's excellent little independent label.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2006

www.antboymusic.com

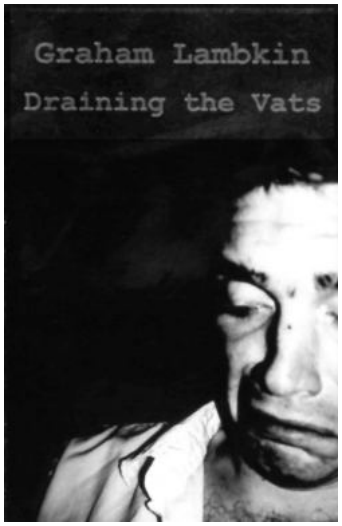
Graham Lambkin

Draining the Vats

USA PINEAPPLE TAPES 006 CASSETTE (2006)

Draining the Vats, but not scraping the bottom of the barrel we hope! Following the disbanding of The Shadow Ring (and ironically seeing something of an upswing of interest in their work, especially as represented on the Siltbreeze label), here arrives this tape on friend Scott Foust's cassette label, offering a survey of tape works, room recordings, and low-key electronic music by Lambkin realised over 1998-2005. It contains a large number of solo efforts, but also one in collaboration with Foust, one with Don Raleigh, and a couple of rehearsal tapes of Elklink, an obscure 'side project' featuring members of The Shadow Ring and Harry Pussy. It turns out to be a beguiling and extremely baffling tape. The two 'Untitled' pieces on side one are extremely enigmatic. One of them was concocted in a hotel room in Florida with Scott Foust, and seems to have been distilled from fortuitous TV broadcasts and the sound of both men larking it up with strange voices and manic laughter. The other simply features Lambkin laughing to himself, probably at home, over a background of eerie classical chamber music. The music element may have been treated; it seems to loop at least once or twice. Lambkin's unexpected bursts of chortling verge on the alarming.

'Evolution', one of the few pieces which comes close to delivering a simple narrative structure, uses overdubs of voices making grunting and moaning sounds, juxtaposed with a simple linear keyboard drone. It suggests that Lambkin takes a pessimistic view of man's evolutionary progress, as the Neanderthal grunts never develop into human speech; the human race seems, according to him, to be stuck at a primitive stage of development. The two Elklink pieces, both rehearsal tapes, are the only concession I can find here to meeting a conventional music audience halfway. I was expecting something noisy-ish, given Adris Hoyos's background, but instead we have sumptuous and spiky combinations of electric guitar with tapes and synths; slow, exploratory works that simultaneously soothe and alarm the listener, the mesmerising pace laced with tension and paranoia.



Everything on this marvellous tape has the same quiet intensity, a studied melancholy, a deep concentration, and a vaguely perplexing quality. Also, we find, everything is realised by the most simple and economical means possible. These experiments give the impression of a questing mind, not quite knowing what it is he will discover, and suggesting that he has to go through these strange processes to find out what it is he's trying to say, and more importantly why he thought he wanted to say it in the first place. Some of the most significant and personal art gets created this way. Half-joke, half-genius, *Draining the Vats* is packed with ideas and represents a gorgeous sonic mystery trip around the inner recesses of Lambkin's strange mind.

ED PINSENT 21/11/2006

www.anti-naturals.org/swill

Will Montgomery

Water Blinks

UK SELVAGEFLAME 01 CD (2005)

Find your way past the inscrutable surface of *Water Blinks* and you will discover a rich sound-world of subtle shifts and changes, exquisite arrangements of imperceptible micro-events. Music journalist Montgomery achieves these effects working with 'irregular patterns and impure sounds', and he places other sounds and musics discreetly in the background – some improvised music, some contemporary compositions, some field recordings. I would guess that all the above ingredients are extensively re-processed, because the entire disc sounds deliciously un-natural and firmly insists on its own reality as a completely artificial soundworld. Further, Montgomery goes out of his way to avoid such devices as repetition, melody, and continuity of form; anything resembling 'music', in short. Yet he still somehow delivers a compelling and mysterious experience. From what I can glean about his working methods, which do seem to involve splintering and stitching digital fragments on a microscopic scale, he may owe some sort of a debt to English composer John Wall, and some of the early Mego experimenters (Hecker, for example). Ten electro-acoustic miniatures in 41 minutes, perhaps a little 'precious' in the presentation, but he does it all with great deliberation, and at least five or six of these unobtrusive, yet highly insistent, demons will end up boring little holes into your memory.

ED PINSENT 25/07/2006

www.selvageflame.com

Al Margolis / If, Bwana

Rex Xhu Ping

USA POGUS PRODUCTIONS P21038-2 CD (2005)

Margolis, the rugged individualist of electro-acoustic, returns with a new collection of six varied tape-work exercises and episodes; at least half of them are tainted with fragments of voices. Many of these voice elements are original contributions by Laura Biagi and Dan Andreana, yawping out recitations or song-speech performances, subsequently treated by the magic fingers of Mr Bwana. Among the purely 'instrumental' outings, we have 'Frog Field' and 'Oy Vey, Angie', both of which deliver ambiguous layers of strange, moaning murk. The 'Angie' piece is realised with a small orchestra of players; friends of Al playing the organ, trombone, guitar, cello, and synths, and allowing their contributions to be extensively reworked by Margolis behind the editing and reprocessing suite. 'Frog Field' conversely was made using just one instrument (a vibraphone) as a starting point, and with its miniature tones has greater simplicity and clarity than he usually manages in his over-cluttered escapades, to which the word 'limpid' is rarely applied.

'Cicada #5: version Bohman' contains many a resampled fragment of Adam Bohman's voice, presumably taken from his idiosyncratic cassette diaries. It was a welcome relief for me to hear this friendly and familiar Englishman's voice, immediately recognisable and yet transmuted into something utterly strange. 'Tattooed Love Muffins' is a queasy sound-poem assemblage that misfires somewhat; if offered such muffins in a tearoom, I would politely decline. 'Quaderni' may be the most successful cut on the disc, a singular and striking admixture of voice fragments, with the sustained combination of

metallic, shimmering and dark droning sounds, all bubbling together among the mismatched ingredients of Margolis' soup. *Rex Xhu Ping* may not be his strongest collection, but it does serve up enough of his characteristic muddy and slow-moving dementia to satisfy.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2006

pogal@pogus.com
www.pogus.com

rlw

i.k.k. - purpur

PORTUGAL SIRR 0025 CD (2005)

Prolific Ralf Wehowsky recorded another new piece one day and later sent it off in the mail to six friends and collaborators for remixing / versioning / reprocessing / reworking / repurposing. It began with a recording of his young daughter Sonja singing a song. But it's more than just a recording of her singing (which you can't hear anyway, because it seems he transformed it into absolute 'pure' sound), it's also weighted with a concept. Said concept seems to have something to do with Christmas time and the spirit and meaning of Christmas, and dates back to an 18th century German song called 'Ihr Kinderlein Kommet'. As far as I can make out this isn't the song which Sonja actually sung. In fact the ideas and connections which RLW spins from this rich mix of cultural baggage are not entirely clear to me, but I expect that (even given his precise and compacted explanation) he has deliberately left matters as ambiguous as he possibly can. However, he does mention something about the religious inclinations, or otherwise, of his chosen collaborators, which may have some bearing. Hidden somewhere within these abstract sounds, there may be a reaction against the schmaltzy, sentimentalised version of Yuletide which has dogged mankind for so long; or perhaps there's an implicit criticism of the established Church; or even a more ambitious attempt to negate Christianity altogether. In keeping with that, maybe Ralf should have chosen to work with twelve collaborators instead of six. Anyway, what did his disciples get up to?

Dan Warburton used Sonja's vocal and breathing as a template for his piece. He had no interest in the lyrics or content of the song, only in the sound of her physical breathing actions, which he put through a noise-gate, to trigger other prepared sounds. Chris Halliwell may have been more interested than that in the content of the song, because he added a new recording of Laura Evans singing and playing the oboe. Strotter Inst., the new Boy Wonder on the turntable block, simply transferred RLW's recordings directly onto dub plates, which he placed onto his magic turntables (to great effect, I might add!). Also here: Andrew Deutsch, Stephen Vitiello, and a three-way collaboration between Johannes Frisch, Bhob Rainey and rlw.

Finally, I'm not sure if the results of all this noodling and theorising amount to much more than a series of 'interesting' process art pieces, but there are plenty of digital goodies on offer to those listeners who love solid electronic sounds in their diet (and very little else). The best moments do sustain a feeling of tension, and the quieter passages are packed with tiny yet very surprising events, if you listen out for them. No denying the craft of any of these guys; once they receive a CD and a proposal from Ralf in the mail, they go all the way to make the most of it, yielding maximal effects from minimal information and input. As to Ralf himself, he may 'explain' a bit too much sometimes, but this never detracts from the quality of his prolific output. Another contemporary / intellectual electronica gem on SIRR.

ED PINSENT 29/07/2006

www.sirr-ecords.com

Earzumba

Simulando un refugio

USA OLD GOLD NO NUMBER CD (2005)

Surprise of the week – an unassuming little disc by a solo Argentinian who has Reynols connections, is also known simply as 'CD' and operates as a member of The Lens Cleaner Trio, and which it turns out to be a beguiling and quite ingenious work of avant-pop noise collage…11 tracks, of which the first nine form a continuous and ever-changing suite of colourful electronic tapestry-stitching. Plenty of drama, excitement, contrast, shifts and ideas to be found in this tasty, abstract, instrumental goop. Christian Dergarabedian did everything – played the guitars, percussion, flute, theremin, Fender Rhodes piano – in 2004, realising his ideas with the help of producer Kim Gomez. The odd thing is I thought it was an electronica piece, but clearly from that list it's played with real instruments, despite the overall 'synthetic' surface which may simply result from studio processing and blending. Title translates as 'Simulating a shelter' and seems to hint at some form of virtual-reality refuge – indeed Earzumba does create something of an artificial space you could live inside (or at least spend a pleasant afternoon there). This is likewise suggested by the canopy of trees on the cover photo, no skies visible, an enclosed natural space of autumnal browns with a surreal figure for company. Earzumba has been doing 'tricky pop and electroacoustic music' since 1991, and besides all the solo configurations above he's collaborated with everyone from Ernesto Diaz Infante to Eloi Silvestre, and he takes the work of philosopher Joachim Raphael Boronali as his personal guide through life.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2006

www.oldgold.org

Anla Courtis / The Moglass / Andrey Kiritchenko

Courtis / Kiritchenko / Moglass

UKRAINE NEXSOUND ns49 / USA CARBON RECORDS CR122 / NORWAY TIBPROD tibCD80 / USA GOLDSOUNDZ GS#46 CD (2006)

Reasonable and effective collection of 'file-sharing' sonic experiments, presumably done by sending discs through the mail for collaborative purposes on the computer and mixing desk, without any physical meeting of human beings taking place. The two Nexsound label stars (including the label owner) are joined by Anla Courtis from Buenos Aires, who continues to cement his position as an off-beat all-rounder on the international stage. First come three tracks by Andrey Kiritchenko, mostly using his guitars and field recordings, with some additional source material by Courtis. Everything is gradually denatured, processed and filtered until it becomes the rather familiar field of moaning murk, but even so many moments of uncertainty and out-of-control panic are added in. The third piece features some very nice jagged guitar fragments. I read these as portraits of mental terrors, doubts and fears, rendered in sound; Kiritchenko is masterful in his seamless treatments, even if there is a tad too much of the 'all-purpose' electronica holding it all together like so much Polyfilla.

Next come three tracks by The Moglass, based largely on their highly unique group approach to guitar and synth music with added vocals, again with additional sound sources thrown into the cauldron by the Argentinean wizard. The tracks are (a) very deep and far-distant drone music, which I associatively call 'nostalgic', aided by an echoing guitar and a tinkly piano preset, all in the service of a lukewarm Tangerine Dream pastiche. Nice stuff. (b) eccentric and vivacious violin playing with a crazy voice spitting and sputtering, with menacingly random electronic

backdrops. Disconcerting. (c) A deep and heavy echo-chamber special, with lots of loud bass emanations, snarling guitar chords, and ethereal synth work, conveying the impressionistic image of driving slowly down a deserted road at night under a lurid purple sky. Grandiose!

Lastly there are five works by Anla Courtis where he manipulates sound files given to him by the Ukrainians. These are all extremely interesting for the way they keep changing constantly, the number of fresh approaches and ideas for how to bring about those changes, and the variety of sounds and textures generated in the changing process. However, everything is also rather shapeless – even a little bit pointless. As I come to end of each piece, I can only recall vague pleasurable sensations, but nothing much concrete about them. In his favour, I do like the vague feeling of mayhem and craziness that Anla seems to bring to just about everything he touches these days, even when it's merely odd murmuring electronica, and over-familiar rumble-and-drone material that currently fills my life like so much mattress stuffing.

I guess The Moglass just about 'win' this bout with their varied mid-section, but the record remains a good document of weird folk meeting up (virtually, that is), with odd-sounding and generally freaky results. It's particularly nice when melodic guitar chords suddenly surface through mounds of glorp and come into focus, as happens in many places throughout the whole CD. Rotten cover art, unfortunately.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2006

www.nexsound.org
www.carbonrecords.com
goldsoundz2003@hotmail.com
www.tibprod.com
ww.via.org.gr/1000+1tilt

Hassle Hound
Limelight Cordial
GERMANY STAUBGOLD 65 CD / LP (2005)

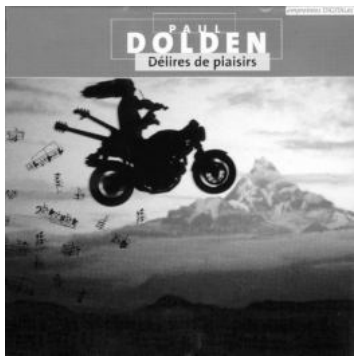
Plenty of smiles on this pleasantly clever humourous cut-up record…it's by a trio of players, Tony Swain and Mark Vernon from Glasgow, and Ela Orleans, a Polish woman living in Brooklyn. Mark Vernon is one half of Vernon & Burns and also Boy Band Tax Returns. Together, they use computers, samples, loops, keyboards and some live instruments (including vocals), mostly piecing their music out of old records as they 'rip and twist through the best and most eclectic of record collections, ripping out and tearing off ideas and samples'. This approach to pastiche is very much in the mode of People Like Us, and even uses similar source material – recordings of radio announcers, and easy listening records, and many choice moments from same, usually selected on the strength of their utter inanity. The record manages to raise a few chortles with its jolly juxtapositions, most notably on the opening track which reminded me of 'Frontier Psychiatrist' by The Avalanches (it even includes a neighing horse as a lead vocalist). Ultimately though, this record is - well, a bit too nice; the trio seem to shy away from discordant moments in the music, things never get quite weird enough to make you notice anything out of the ordinary, and the targets for satire are simply too obvious. Despite claims of Hassle Hound to be a 'benign tornado', I think they treat the records they sample with a shade too much respect.

ED PINSENT 18/10/2006

www.staubgold.com

Paul Dolden
Délires de plaisirs
CANADA empreintes DIGITALes IMED 0577 CD (2005)

Well, at last. In this day and age of minimal everything, here finally is a self-proclaimed maximalist. Yes, Canadian Paul Dolden is your man and he's not ashamed to wear his heart on his sleeve. He is described as having been a 'professional' electric guitarist at the age of 16, who then went on to violin and cello, so the words 'prodigy' and 'child' tend to creep into the picture. He's since hunkered down with computers of course, now producing a wild, cacophonous electro-acoustic music that puts everything into the mixer and presses full speed ahead.



The CD features three works: the first large piece taking up the first four tracks of the album, 'Entropic Delights', is somewhat modestly described as a 'compositional masterpiece' (not shy these maximalists are they?), while the remaining two tracks are taken up by 'The Gravity of Silence, Resonance #5', and the ambitiously-titled 'The Heart Tears itself Apart with the Power of its own Muscle, Resonance #3', the later two being both tape-based works designed to be performed with live accompaniment, in the first case flute, in the second a veritable string orchestra.

I won't even try and describe individual passages; instead I will take the sort of macro view that is surely only fitting. It's Baroque, obese, profligate, complex, noise that is in places some kind of academic jazz-rock of the sort that most sensible people became rather embarrassed about many years ago, while in other places it actually comes about as close as one probably can to melding rock and classical elements. Elsewhere, it sounds like outtakes from a lost Queen album. I found the last two bits entirely more inviting than the first long one, which - far from a masterpiece - was a clunker. Sit through it all in one hit and you'll soon be singing the praises of La Monte Young.

AARON ROBERTSON

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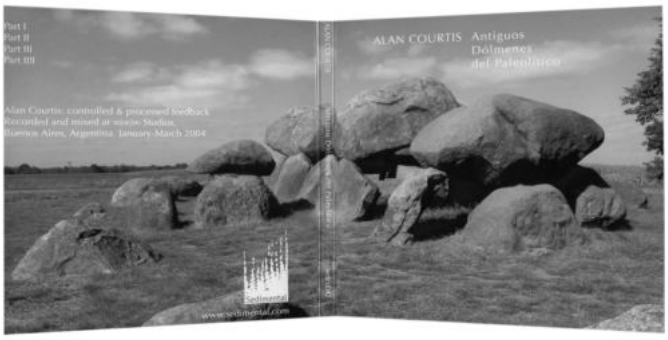


Alan Courtis
Antiguos Dólmenes del Paleolítico
USA SEDIMENTAL sedcd042 CD (2006)

Four experiments in manipulated feedback by Anla, done by feeding it through a mixing desk, effects processors, and other equipment. Themed loosely on the idea of dolmens, with helpful pictures on the cover in case you didn't know what one looked like. Courtis has delivered something quite different to Toshimaru Nakamura's slightly menacing approach in the same area, but each piece remains static, uneventful, and lacking in any real depth; just endless, synthetic-sounding droning, tweeting and pweeping. We don't have dolmens as such in this country (I associate them with mainland Europe), but I have visited the sites of certain ancient stone monuments, and I would suggest they convey something quite different to what is proposed by this music. The only bit that's accurate in Alan's portrait is the 'static' quality. Even so, this work does have much more substance than some of his faltering experiments from 2-3 years ago. Realised in 2004, this is his first full-length solo release.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2006

www.sedimental.com

Violet / Alexei Borisov / Michael Gendreau

Bogatiri

ZEROMOON ZERO006 CD (2005)

Very enjoyable 'art music' oddity; it's three live pieces, recorded in Russia, late 2003, and each artiste serves up a prime example of their electro-acoustic work. Michael Gendreau creates an oppressive imaginary-space construct in sound, and it's called 'Noceur', both title and mood somehow suggestive of a very dark nocturne. We're a long way from Fauré, however. It's mostly long, quiet and very insistent cricket-chirping noises, with mysterious faint traces of murmuring voices sitting somewhere at the foundation. Often cricket music will soothe a listener into a dreamy slumber, but this menacing sound-art piece will provide anything but a good night's rest to the troubled insomniac. Californian Gendreau is also Crawling With Tarts and has built whirling turntables of doom; see above for one of his operas created out of old vinyl. For this solo work, he operates with sine wave generators, field recordings, and amped-up motors.

Alexei Borisov gets more interesting the more I hear from him, yet I can articulate very little about his delicate and subtly subversive activities. With a 25-year history behind him, he's a real big guy in contemporary Russian experimental electronic music. He may be continuing his critique of modern man's urban environment and its harmful effects on our collective minds and bodies. In this electronics and voice-sample piece 'Extra-KT' of his, there's a lot more event than I normally associate with his lengthy quietly-rumbling escapades. Rhythmic waves of white noise, throbbing bass-note patterns, and further spoken-word mumblings (all speech is rendered down into a totally unintelligible morass of burbling) are forced together in this extract from a much longer live performance; the indistinct sounds don't really coalesce as much as float together vaguely in the same shared imaginary space. Every bit as 'enclosing' and claustrophobic as Gendreau's piece above.

Violet is Jeff Surak, he runs the Zeromoon label and also has a 25-year history; he has a piece called 'Demonstration of Decay', a little more conventional compared with the two above oddballs, being ordinary laptop-manipulated glitch, but there is some nice fizz and crackle on offer to engage the ears. The economy of means he used was impressive – one sixty-second sample of short wave radio noise, played back on damaged or lo-fi equipment to create massive overload and feedback. It too is equally oppressive, giving some sonic unity to the entire disc – it's a real 'solitary confinement' special. There may also be some conceptual unity in the use of human voices being treated in such ways as to make the spoken word evaporate, thus causing all meaning and sense to disappear along with it, until the voice becomes no more than a musical murmur. This method of obscuring everything in digital murk adds great intrigue to this collection of sound art.

ED PINSENT 06/08/2006

www.zeromoon.com

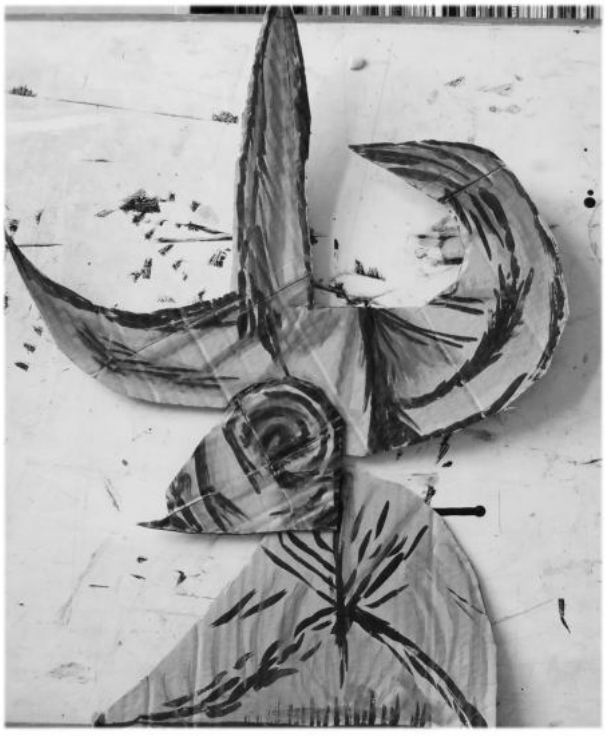
Additional Tapework Terrificness

An international selection of A-list musicians gather together to pay their tributes in sound to **John Watermann** on *Epitaph For John* (KORM PLASTICS kp 3016). Watermann is completely unknown to me; he was a highly regarded and energetic artist, film-maker, and sound artist from Berlin, whose sonic manifestations surfaced from the late 1980s on small-run LPs on the Nightshift label which are now extremely rare. He died in 2002. Those who salute him include **Asmus Tietchens**, **Ralf Wehowsky**, **Merzbow**, and **Freiband** (ie Frans de Waard), who also include their brief but heartfelt texts in the package. Many of them rework the field recordings of Watermann into new pieces of their own, and one of Watermann's own source material pieces 'Toowong Cemetery' is also included in the set. This is a fascinating collection with many strengths, RLW's 13-minute 'Seeking Perfection - Somewhere Else' being a real standout. (EP)

Simon Wickham-Smith, heard from frequently in the 1990s often in collaboration with Richard Youngs, makes a reappearance of sorts as curator of *DIY Canons* (POGUS 21036-2). This compilation CD features various musicians giving us their interpretations of **Larry Polansky**'s *Four Voice Canons*, a series he begun in 1975. It's something to do with overlapping voices and arrangement of time signatures and was offered by Polansky as a kind of 'open source' score – he wanted lots of people to join in and advertised this suggestion freely at lectures and on his website. Making their own canon works here are Mike Winter, Mike Swinchoski, Ross Craig, Steven M Miller, George Zelenz, and many more. Some use their voices, other play instruments, and this double CD is packed with good stuff. (EP)

Working with basic tape recording equipment, **Anla Courtis** worked on various solo electro-acoustic projects during 1991-1998, at which time the Reynols band was in full swing. Now he's released a selection of them as *Tape Works* (POGUS P21040-2), along with an explanatory booklet. Jim Haynes points out that 'the cassette and the tape deck remain primary tools in [Courtis'] compositional sensibility'. My favourite here is 'Jarabe de Llanura', a reworking of water recordings. Courtis remarks 'in certain passages of this piece, water performs better than any human guitarist indeed. Or maybe it just turns into a kind of liquid Hendrix'. (EP)

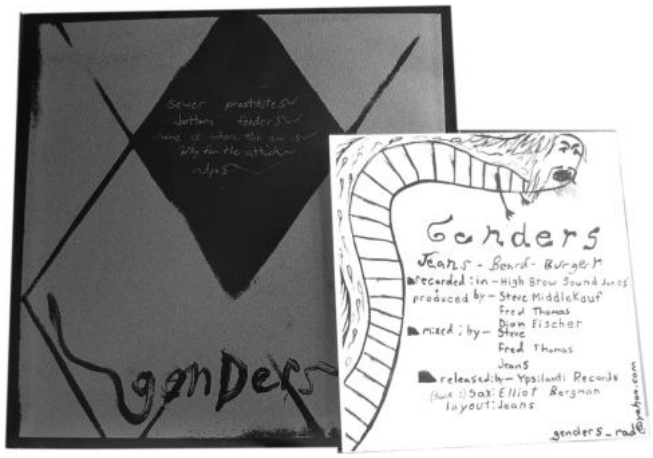
Fortner Anderson is a Canadian poet who wrote and voiced all the material on *Six Silk Purses* (WIRED ON WORDS WOWCD009), and the interpreters of his work are sound artists Chantal Dumas, Alexandre St-Onge, Alexander MacSween, Christof Migone, Sam Shalabi, and Michel F Côté. He gave them recordings of his poetry readings and they were asked to produce sonic interpretations, the result being one of the most opaque records I've heard for a long time. There's an explanatory booklet with full texts and plenty of helpful advice from Anderson himself, but I'm still baffled. (EP)



VINYL VIANDS EMANATING FROM ☆☆☆AMERICA☆☆☆

A tasty selection of vinyl LPs from the US Underground

Who says vinyl has died a death? Not the enthusiastic youth of America, that's for sure! You gotta admire the conviction of those who take the trouble to present their work in a nice sturdy and expensive vinyl package, when the cheap CDR option is always the path of least resistance. Below, a number of items which I either purchased myself or (in one or two instances) were sent to the mag. This chatty round-up section will also include lots of pretty pictures. For seeking out this music, should you feel so inclined, why not send enquiries to the good people at Fusetron Sound or Eclipse Records. (ED PINSENT)



Genders

Genders

USA YPSILANTI RECORDS YR 2005A LP (2005)

This is by a trio of unknown Americans who identify themselves by the familiar cognomens 'Burger', 'Beard' and 'Jeans'. I assume these nicknames refer to the particular predilections and choices of each, regarding general diet, permitted amounts of facial hair, and daily sartorial selections, although they may also translate into character traits of some sort. After all, a man named 'Burger' is surely someone you can trust...all soft and inviting on the outside, and hot and hearty within. These names also convey to me a certain blue-collar vibe which I don't find on the record at all. In fact it's a pretty bleak collection of stark, lonely songs of alienation, recorded with a slight amount of grungy grit and generally rendered in a style which I find to be a fully accurate carbon-copy of that UK post-punk era, a period from the late 1970s to the early 1980s when everyone professed to a fondness for Dub and Reggae records, and was exploring musical and psychological avenues that Punk had steered clear of. Genders, then, have a sound and approach which is very reminiscent of Joy Division, The Slits, The Pop Group, and (almost) This Heat as well. Minimal arrangements, mean and reedy guitar lines, skeletal bass guitar lines, up-front drum machines to fake a dub beat, songs with only three lines of lyrics, and much repetition of these lyrics; my favourite song here simply keens 'I lost control' over and over for about three minutes. The six songs dwell in strange and unworthy places, with titles such as 'Sewer Prostitutes' (there's one Mark Stewart woulda loved!), 'Apes' and 'Home is where the gun is', plus the sleeve art features worrying images of worms and snakes, one of which has a human face…indeed, all that slithers on the earth is here. Filled with brooding, hatred, tension, paranoia, angst and fear (all good things to match your depressed mood), is it any wonder I like this LP? Pressed in blue vinyl with sleeve and insert decorated with painterly, inky scrawls. From Sister Ray shop.

ED PINSENT 04/11/2005

Terrestrial Tones

Dead Drunk

USA PAW TRACKS PAW 9 LP (2006)

Their debut was on Psych-o-Path records and was a big hit in these four walls, so I felt compelled to snap this one up too. It's a bit thinner than that initial gory outburst, but still has some golden guts that make the purchase good value, groove for groove. The duo is Eric Copeland from Black Dice and Dave Portner from Animal Collective, and they mostly do strange voice workouts colliding with tape-manipulation, loops, and general electronic mayhem. The treated and distorted voices, mostly issuing their feral grunts in a high, soprano register, sprawl and trot their way across crowded vistas of abstract sound. You never know what path they'll tread next. Sometimes the duo get a little 'dippy', by which I mean they overdo one particular obsession and end up pounding it into the ground, without really sharing with us why they were getting so worked up about it in the first place. But when they're 'on', then they're like a dose of delirium – passing on a feverish, drugged, hallucinatory state, even on short tracks like 'Gargoyle', which is a noteworthy and ugly episode of fever-dream madness. 'Car Fumes' is admittedly quite charming too, lurching out with a gritty sound that does indeed seem to contain a large amount of noxious carbons, and the vocalist emitting a sneering drawl not unlike the evil twin of William Burroughs. Not that you can make out a single word of his monologue, of course. Black vinyl pressing for this beasticle, wrapped in a full-colour sleeve of excessive, splotchy, scratchy

abstract painting which looks like a pile of Jackson Pollock's vomit. Undoubtedly one to listen to when you yourself are 'dead drunk', tanked up on a good litre and a half of cheap red wine.

ED PINSENT 04/11/2005

Axolotl / The Skaters

Split LP

USA CATSUP PLATE RECORDS CPR 723 (2006)

Fab vinyl slab of 'hot' US noise. Got it in Other Music in New York City June 2006. I'm not a frequent visitor to that wonderful town. I liked the Other Music shop, though some say it's no more exciting or interesting than Rough Trade in London. Soon after purchase I was obliged to show the contents of my shopping bag at the dinner table to some people we were meeting in a restaurant. This was awkward for me, as I knew they wouldn't really have a clue what the music was about. One of them, on sight of this LP, unexpectedly started wittering on about a poem he'd read about an 'Axolotl', mainly to bring home to me how educated he was and well-versed in literature. (Why do some Americans act so insecure about their intelligence?) He mysteriously concluded that the band Axolotl had clearly borrowed their name from this poem which he'd read. I have no idea what he was basing that on, other than reading the name off the LP cover.

Axolotl would be similarly bemused by that pretentious observation, I feel sure. To me now, listening snug at home and safe from that fatuous New Yorker, this band get better all the time. Last time I looked, they were a trio based in San Francsico comprising Karl Bauer, William Sabiston and Brian Tester; Bauer had connections with Sightings, Double Leopards, and Black Dice. Their 2004 debut on Psych-O-Path was a goodie, but more acoustic and dribbly than this example 'Holon', which is much more about layered noise generated by post-production methods. It's distorted, treated, overamped, creating the rushing effect of a speeding jet-plane engine yet still with a 'musical' droning centre at the core. It's uncanny in its gaseous qualities, music which seems to be everywhere at once – inside your head and lungs, as well as filling your ears. The dream-like trance-state will fall upon you mighty speedily. The glorious loud first track segues directly into the softer, lovely second part of the suite, and brings a centre-less, toneless, floating delight to your body. Your eyes feel like they're watching a shimmering, psychedelic light show, while your nose is convinced that the air is filled with mystic incense and balms from the East. This segues into the third and final celestial segment, a heavenly zone achieved by the use of great creaking boards of sound, sonic architecture on a grand scale, like wooden planks twenty feet long. Axolotl don't need to name themselves after a poem – when they get as good as this, they ARE a poem.

The Skaters side is called 'Bodydoor Procession'. James Ferraro and Spencer Clark, also from SF, continue to peddle their unique brand of malarkey, of which I personally can't get my fill. This one is utterly alien, a distorted recording of what was probably a pretty cracked performance to begin with, putting their strange miaowling voices at the fore, along with some madcap piano plunking and a general air of heavy mic feedback hanging over the atmosphere. While not as heavy or dynamic as the Axolotl side, this is a good episode of dementia which conveys the sense of other-worldly, non-human entities making music as a private language of some sort. The Skaters...I wonder what poem they took their name from?

ED PINSENT 04/11/2005

Excepter

Self Destruction

USE FUSETRON 41 / EXCEPTER RECORDS ER 03 LP (2005)

Not a wildly exciting record from this NYC combo unfortunately. Analogue synths make their moan with plenty of white noise hiss, not unlike the sound that greets the owners of Sun Ra's *My Brother The Wind*, except Sun Ra always knew what he was doing when he had a Moog in his mitts. Alongside their feeble electronic doodling, Excepter also hath drum machines playing weedy disco beats. Above it all, the assorted vocalists of this mixed-sex five piece combo add wispy contributions from their gob-like appurtenances. This 'singing' is anything but what you'd expect from one trained in that art; the words (if any) are buried in a morass of unintelligible murmuring, and the tunes they limn are freely-roaming, tuneless, anti-melodies. You see? This is what comes of media pundits championing the investigation of ESP-Disk releases among the cognoscenti, thereby ensuring that every home has a copy of *Patty Waters Sings*, and worse still, we sometimes get people like this who decide they want to emulate her. The difference being that Patty Waters knew about things like scales and pitch, and was disciplined enough to know when and how she could depart from them.

The vocalists in Excepter, I suggest, may have some way to go before they reach the status of a Patty Waters. The B side of this LP has the band doing their awful ineffectual vocalising on the top of a drum machine with insipid electronics, and resembles nothing so much as an informal snapshot of avant-disco fans trying out their new karaoke machine at home. The A side fares slightly better, but I continue to find their wilful obfuscation of content somewhat vexing. I have a CD by this bunch on Load Records (*Throne*) which I like better. This release is unfortunately tipping the balance out of their favour. Bought this one in Sister Ray of London.

ED PINSENT 04/11/2005

Burning Star Core

West Coast Spring 2004

USA WHAT THE…? RECORDS WHAT-001 LP (2006)

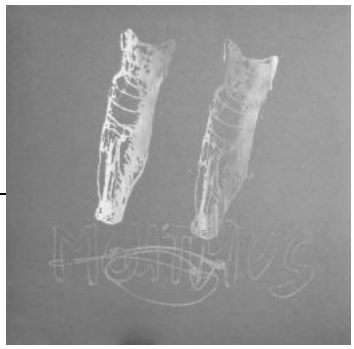
C. Spencer Yeh is the one constant member of this project, which is very often just him performing solo but sometimes him with collaborators; here Yeh plays the violin and does vocals, with worthy constituent Robert Beatty on live electronics. These 2004 performances were recorded in Seattle and San Francisco, and originally issued on Yeh's own Dronedisco label as cassettes. Glory be! How fortunate we are to have them rescued now and engraved on vinyl. It's about the strongest free noise I've heard for a long while, extremely performative and structured, with tons of free space and exciting dynamics. These two guys never fall asleep, nor start acting 'weird' with pseudo religious-chanting or droning, nor do they try and turn each piece into an ear-splitting endurance test for the audience. What they do is simply play exceptionally well together and make great noise-music. The main piece on the A side sounds like a meeting of Ornette Coleman (from around the time of his *Science Fiction* LP) and David Tudor…Yeh's violin is full of scrape, stretch and snap, and the live electronics mean the whole piece just crackles with crisp, clear tension throughout. They sustain this level of energy and interest without faltering, until we hear the gasps of disbelief and applause from the delighted (though small) audience. The B side starts off with something more conventionally droney, but Yeh's violin with its added echo and electronic enhancement achieves Theremin-like hoots. The duo take the

piece for a cosmic meander, daring to move away from the root note of the drone, and finding more and more layers of unexplored territory to stake out. This piece is totally bent out of shape by the time they're finished with it; they don't get mired down in that droney trance, and have the skills and confidence to change radically what they're doing as soon as the occasion demands it. You don't encounter genuine on-the-edge improv like this very often. Covers are pasted onto a black master bag of this limited pressing release, and inserts include two cut-out 'masks' of the guys – a whimsical touch which I find delightful. A most excellent release. Bought this beaut in NYC from Mr Prurient's Hospital Productions shop.

ED PINSENT 04/11/2005

Mouthus

Mouthus
USA OLDE ENGLISH
SPELLING BEE OESB-02 LP
(2006) 350 copies



Another 'belter' of weird free noise from this Brooklyn duo. They used to be guitar and drums merchants, but Heaven knows how they're making this ungodly racket. They also previously made some concessions to creating 'songs'. Not any more. This is simply two side-long pieces of harsh, gritty, electronic and guitar noise that will satisfy any man's bloodthirsty lust for all-out sonic lunacy. But it's a million miles away from 'power electronics'. Each side is shot through with an insistent rhythm that will ultimately cause your brain to collapse – nagging away at your senses, biting your nerve endings like a swarm of wild insects…and every moment of the music has hidden depths, layers of other sounds buried and embedded like land mines in every inch of the terrain. Loops, explosions, tidal waves, forest fires…it's an intense, wide-screen depiction of an impossible global panorama, showing the entire world locked into various forms of ecological impossibility. Unlike certain brands of table noise or effects-driven noise, which often have the inflexible pounding of a jackhammer (and arrive with the equally inflexible insistence on the part of its creators that you are going to accept it because they tell you it's good for you), Mouthus create a totally open-ended framework that envelops you like a strange blanket of plaster-of-paris and scrim. The patterns they create develop from human energies, the biological truths of vibrating cells, and not from the mindless programmed brain of a micro-computer or a printed circuit. Issued in a plain blue sleeve which is screen-printed with an image of two mummified cats (I think), same image rendered in a spiky scrawl, these recordings from December 2003 amount to an exhilarating destructo binge of bash. Another purchase from Sister Ray in London; these things don't stick around for long (and do they ever order more than one copy?)

ED PINSENT 04/11/2005

New Humans

Disassociate
USA AVANT / SAVANT AVSV 02 VINYL LP (2006)

The duo of Mike Tajima and Howie Chen recorded this art-piece in Brooklyn; using guitars, basses, oscillators and drums, they create a tautly structured and restrained piece of minimal rock, but also something resolutely 'hand-made' in its execution. Like Tony Conrad, with whom they have shared a bill, they may follow a pre-determined system, but they do so in a completely humanistic way. No machines in evidence; all is played from start to end in real-time by young men plucking strings and vibrating their oscillators. This is the second release from the duo who appear to be rooted in gallery art, installations, Op Art, and minimalism. There is also a vaguely conceptual side to what they do. Each track is assigned 25 titles (printed in full using arty typography on the insert), and the screen-printed sleeve has a luminescent segment so that, they claim, you can look and listen in the dark. In fact the cover art looks like a drawing of a sculpture by Richard Serra.

New Humans have grand designs…they speak of 'monolithic', 'expansive' and 'tangents', although to what overall purpose I remain uncertain. In fact, even though there's no denying the conviction and gravity in their playing, the first side comes across as slightly subdued – a bit too quiet and with too many gaps either side of some perplexing bass throbs. Side two is livelier though, being noisier and grittier and even propelled with some basic beats, as if sounds had strayed in from some underground radio broadcast. No groove or swing here, though; the music remains stern, solemn and arty. What fervoured purpose drives these gifted young men? Overall it's a nice and sometimes puzzling statement combining heavy bass, guitars, amplifiers, oscillators, texts, and screen-printing; but

the vinyl pressing is a little muddy, and one simply wishes it had more room-filling presence to give it that edge of unavoidable import.

ED PINSENT 21/10/2006

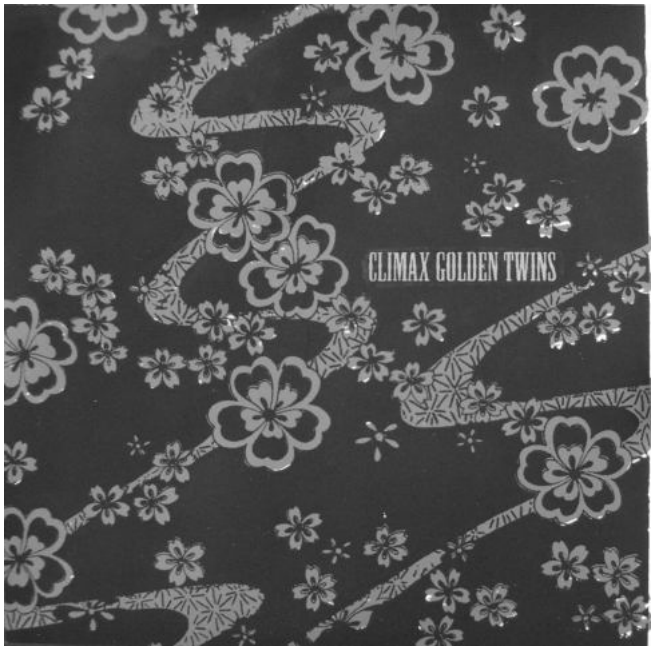
www.newhumansnyc.com

Climax Golden Twins

Climax Golden Twins

BELGIUM CONSPIRACY RECORDS CORE 039 LP (2006)

My fave US duo Rob Millis and Jeff Taylor with a new LP, probably with the help of Scott Colburn on drums. The A side is a real mixed bag of nuts – guitar instrumentals, short aural collages using fields recordings and selections from old 78 rpm records, 'ambient' music made with phased guitars, heavy rocking guitar noise, and acoustic picking on such instruments as the mandolin or Dobro to add to the 'Americana' flavour. The slow phased guitar pieces may be part of their ongoing 'Sleep' project, the assured acoustic instrumentals will appeal to all sensible collectors of John Fahey records, the angular noisy stuff will please Sun City Girls fans, and the entire A side is a rich fabric of contrasting sounds, styles and effects. However, the real winner for me is the B side – a suite entitled 'Talking Machine', which is much quieter and less restless. It's an extended audio collage which seems to have been collated exclusively from the Twins' personal collection of old 78 rpm records, and other vinyl / recorded obscurities from the past. (Devoted collectors of aural history, they both own Victrolas and curate their shellac collections with diligence.) 'Talking Machine' comprises almost entirely spoken word material, using such sources as vaudeville comedy records, religious sermon records, foreign language records (perhaps from their 'ethnic' collections), and some rare 'record your own voice' artefacts that have survived from that lost Coney Island era of American history. Selected moments from these distressed antiques have been edited together with care, subtlety, and a real understanding of the sources and what I would call the 'sonic consonances' they have found within this very diverse collection. This has the effect of creating an associative trip into the past, through the dusty grooves of American history, revealing many things both rich and strange. It's staggeringly beautiful! This record is mail-order only from Conspiracy Records, an organisation apparently devoted to high-quality low print-run vinyl releases, and has a gorgeous silk-screened cover with an old wallpaper pattern. Irresistible!



ED PINSENT 04/11/2005

Haunted Castle / Grey Skull

Haunted Castle / Grey Skull

USA NOT NOT FUN RECORDS 027 10″ LP (ND)

A split mini-LP featuring a couple of US unknown combos. OK, so clearly I only snapped this one up on the strength of its novelty package, prepared to take a chance on the musical content. The cover (prepared by Shawn Reed) is pretty nifty – a die-cut gatefold in the shape of a skull, screenprinted in orange and green, and covered with fake spider web and a plastic spider. The sort of thing you'd expect to see in any cheap novelty shop at Halloween, except much more stupid and corny. But I guess I can't resist a good skull. When first spun, I decided the record wasn't too bad a listen, although based on today's play I have to admit I wonder what charms I ever heard in it. Also I don't know whose music appears on which side. The A side has the words 'Bleaches and Canyons' in the run out groove, and it starts out quite acceptably with its minimal electronics and scary organ bursts trying to 'creep' you out. 'This bodes well for a good atmospheric bout with the phantoms of my mind', thought I to myself. Sadly it soon deteriorates into badly-done noise-sludge, wherein those concerned simply flip the volume pedals up to max and crank up the 'obnoxiousness' factor in like manner. Flip over to B side for a dose of something equally nasty. The runout groove here proclaims 'Dark Birds Consume Me'. What we hear is a short escapade of yet more ridiculous noise, although some of it appears to be happening in a reasonably interesting 'layered' way. Whatever subtleties the ear may discern however are soon routed by the shouting voices, the huge gobs of feedback, and the animalistic pounding on a drum. According to the Not Not Fun website, Haunted Castle are a duo from Detroit, and Grey Skull are from Easthampton. The whole disc amounts to something quite anti-social, clumsy, horrid, juvenile, and bad. Already sold out at source!

Worth browsing the label website as a lot of their past projects have similar zany packaging strategies that in some cases beggar belief.

ED PINSENT 04/11/2005

www.notnotfun.com

Dead Machines

Dead End at Olson St

USA YPSILANTI RECORDS #27 LP (2006)

A recent one from this Wolf Eyes side-project which comprises the husband and wife team of John Olson and Tovah Olson, the latter also a prominent member of Wooden Wand and The Vanishing Voice. If you line up Wolf Eyes, Hair Police and Dead Machines in a row, then this project tends towards the quieter end of the spectrum, though their overall sounds are no less hideous and horrifying. Admittedly, I wasn't too impressed by this one on early spins, but through judicious increase of the permissible volume levels on my hi-fi I was able to reveal a much richer sound-world than first perceived – slow tractors of doom drive through its streets, factory hooters of death blow eerie signals at regular intervals, and evil clowns seem to be the sole inhabitants of this cursed urban wasteland. An extreme 'downer' from this grinding low-key noise combo, the LP is pressed in white vinyl, and the striking collage cover shows various representative members of the human race (weightlifters, Mariachi musicians, etc) all transformed into zombies by the simple application of white gouache and black ink to their eyeballs. Further white gouache interpolations are used to carve away segments of their bodies, attenuating their gaunt appearance still further. The record itself, one side of live recordings and one side recorded in the band's own Inzane Studios, seems to propose a world in which we're all zombies already, and if not then we're on the verge of joining those growing hordes of the living dead. I'm of course referring to George Romero Hollywood-styled zombies, not those related to the voodoo cult of Haiti.

ED PINSENT 05/11/2005

The No-Neck Blues Band

Quaris

USA 5 RUE CHRISTINE GER 052 / SOUND @ ONE S@1 #81/82 2 x LP (2005)

Surprisingly enjoyable collection of 11 instrumental cuts by this NYC combo, who appear to be gaining a little bit of wider recognition after so many years of struggle in the underground wilderness. They formed in 1992 and have remained about as anti-commercial and obscure as you possibly can, largely out of choice. Musically this is a lot more interesting than I would normally expect from these clanking goons, and it's better recorded too. Why this release is so 'mainstream-friendly' that even *Mojo* magazine took note of it and apparently enjoyed it, and I was able to snag a copy in the Oxford Street branch of HMV Records. I was able to play this pretty much in one sitting and I expect to continue to derive further pleasure from it in years to come. What they're doing in their improvised trundling jams is growing to be much more dynamic than it used to be, less repetitive. No longer content to settle for samey-sounding unchanging epics of monotony, they're gradually moving away from that plodding trudgery and into areas of rhythmic and melodic invention which impress. Some of the longer pieces on *Quaris* may still tend towards meandering formlessness, but they are still entertaining. As noted, it also sounds much crisper and clearer than say that early record of theirs on Center of the Ass Run, or anything else that seems have been documented from the back of a closet. Matt Szwed was the engineer, working in Hint House during March 2005, and he's separated out the instruments using stereo recording, so instead of everything blending into a morass of murk, you can actually hear what's going on. I'm sorry to labour the point about No-Neck's early records, but you have to wonder sometimes if bands are deliberately opting to present us with a grungy lo-fi recording simply because it has the impression of being more 'underground' that way. At all events, I'm happy to be able to recommend this fine record to any musical omnivore who likes rock, jazz and improv in equal amounts, and isn't afraid to take it smeared with a thin layer of 'weirdness' and sandwiched in between certain knowing arty references, like for example the fact that Loplop makes an appearance in one of the titles here and confirms that somebody in No-Neck has heard of Max Ernst.

ED PINSENT 05/11/2005

Tamio Shiraishi / Sean Meehan

Annual Summer Concerts

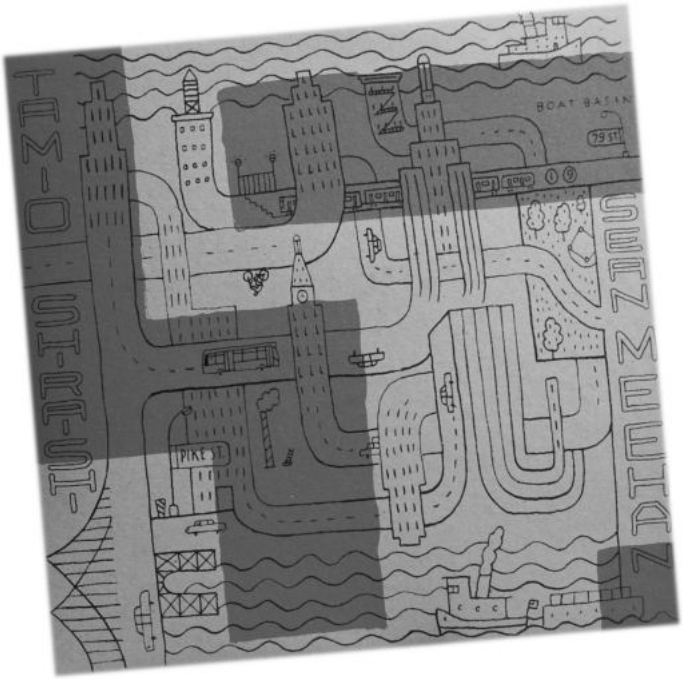
USA OLD GOLD RECORDS OG-NYC / GD STEREO GD-018 LP (2006)

The musicians here are saxophonist Tamio Shiraishi and percussionist Sean Meehan, recorded live in obscure urban settings around NYC by Geoff Dugan; it's as much a record of field recordings as it is a document of live improvised music, and indeed the finished magical result may amount to something more than both. Geoff Dugan has been a firm favourite with this magazine ever since he released two excellent compilation CDs of urban field recordings, *Psychogeographical Dip* and *The Architecture of The Incidental*. Those were both specifically inspired by the art of the Situationist *derive*, whereas this new release seems to align itself more with the recordings Harry Smith made in NYC, when that bearded Magus used to hang his microphone outside the window of the Chelsea Hotel all night and use the resulting street recordings in some unknown magickal rituals. Dugan has been recording this pair of musicians since 2001, using his binaural microphones; he first did it when they were standing next to a highway perimeter in Manhattan, although what we hear on this LP is one side from under the Manhattan Bridge in

Chinatown, and another side near a parking garage near the boat basin on 79th Street. You need only imagine the exciting combinations of sound that are generated as this mournful wailing sax and this scrapey percussion noise pit their sonic utterances against the unheeding, booming sounds of that massive, complex city. Of particular interest is hearing the trains go by over the nearby bridge, their horns sounding, the metal girders shaking and rattling. To say nothing of the overall city ambience, the distant traffic sound, and multiple suggestions of teeming city life happening all around. If you're thinking that this recipe might result in a bustling, aggressive and claustrophobic set of recordings, you'll find that *Annual Summer Concerts* is in fact quite the opposite; I've rarely heard a more soothing record. It sounds slow-moving, deep and contemplative; and somehow suggestive of open, blue skies, tall windows, enormous buildings and mighty girders that can dwarf a man. Yet in the midst of all this urban grandiosity, we hear the lone voices of two determined musical sirens. 'I like to listen to it over stereo speakers on a summer day with the windows open', suggests Dugan in agreement. Add to this a highly nifty sleeve design by Knickerbocker (ie Nicholas Blechman), a gorgeous tactile brown-card sleeve with flaps overprinted in black and red, and a fine piece of 180 gram vinyl inside, and I think you'll agree this release is completely essential.

ED PINSENT 09/12/2006

www.gdstereo.com



Boris

Pink

USA SOUTHERN LORD SUNN55 2 x LP (2006)

One of the few hard-core 'elite' of guitar bands which Southern Lord is prepared to honour with releases on its label, Boris continue to churn out the sort of knowing and contrived 1970s retro-filth which I find very hard to resist. As is well known, Boris also collaborate with Sunn O))) on the *Altar* set. Here, it looks as though these Japanese chancers have come close to making good on all that earlier promise we found in CDs like *Heavy Rocks*, and they continue to pastiche just about any piece of musical history that takes their fancy and that isn't nailed down. The first side comes roaring out with three exceptionally strong blasts of energised psych-punk, where the urgent vocalist sounds as though his whole body is aflame. These tracks burn themselves out in a matter of moments like shooting stars, then the side finishes up with the most excellent 'Blackout', at last providing the sort of ultra-heavy stoner-sludge monster I've been searching for for the last 18 months. All I need is five minutes at home to play it at peak volume and watch the rest of my hair fall out. Further 70s-influenced punk explosions rip into the opening grooves of side two, including 'Electric' and 'Six Three Times', the latter of which is souped-up Pebbles LA garage-thrash with added fuzz-guitar spikiness, ultra-fast hopped-up drumming, and a title which nods to Arthur Lee. 'Afterburner' is the requisite Black Sabbath soundalike piece, so convincing you could

tag it onto the end of a remastered CD copy of *Volume 4* with bonus tracks, and Ozzy Osbourne would hang his head in shame. Boris haven't even gotten started yet, and side 2 ends with 'Pseudo-Bread', starting out with demented acid-casualty wailing and ending up in a sty of incoherent streaming noise, reverb and feedback held for at least seven minutes. How much better can things get?

Side three has a couple of 'slowies', starting with 'My Machine' which uses corny echoed guitar and cosmic exploration effects, to try and steal this particular crown back from Acid Mothers Temple. It segues into 'Farewell', an anthem drenched with even more FX-heavy, overflanged guitar-wanking, creating a massive, overwrought monster of emotional and electronic distortion that earnest prog musicians could only have dreamed of in 1975 as they groomed their beards with Fido's steel comb. Side four, finally, contains the side-long excess of 'Just Abandoned Myself', kicking in with an uptempo start, and the whole band moving together like an express train as they solo and jam with just one note between them; the overdubbed vocal section has never sounded better, suggesting Boris have finally found a way to use technology to overcome the singer's deficiencies. Let's just hope they don't turn into Queen on the next record…after that exciting opening, the piece slides into excruciatingly slow grunge, proposing a form of slow death by rock guitar torture, feedback and meaningless soloing. Meltdown ahoy! *Pink* is pressed in pink vinyl, natch, and housed in a pink sleeve (even the inside of the card is pink!), the front cover has a blown-up detail from a William Blake watercolour for no apparent reason, but it's an image that somehow confirms all the implied prog-rock connotations found in this totally retro mixed-up music. There may be further interesting visual information in the gatefold, but being the sort of anal collector I am I haven't taken this artefact out of its shrink wrap. And if you think that's bad, there are collectors who wouldn't have even opened it, but would have bought a CD copy to listen to instead. Assuming they even want to play records, that is.

ED PINSENT 05/11/2005

Valley Of Ashes

Cavehill Hunters' Attrition

USA BLACK VELVET FUCKERE RECORDINGS / CONSANGUINE RECORDINGS NO NUMBER 3 x LP. 500 copies.

Pretty much on the strength of a passing mention made of their name and a connection with Sapat (whom I do enjoy), I looked up this combo and decided to order this triple-vinyl overdose from Fusetron in the US (he had a few copies left). I wanted endless acoustic jams in the 'psych-folk' mode, and that's what I got…guitars, violins, horns, and impromptu percussion instruments all droning away for a very long time, clearly done by a lot of enthusiastic people sitting together in a big room (hopefully with no socks on) and enjoying every minute of it. Half-empty bottles of red wine are audibly within reach. The resulting music's pretty

ramshackle, half-baked and extremely overlong. A little time spent using the edit button could have whittled this down to a really solid CD, but then, it's taking the time to travel these lesser-wended highways that makes the experience of listening to this sort of music so worthwhile. Even though the combined forces of Valley Of Ashes never once manage to really lift off over the space of six sides, they frequently manage to enter a clumsy, chuntering groove, and stay there for a long time. The very fluidity of the act of creation is the process that they find to be relevant. Although if played end to end the entire set can seem to merge into one single glob of indistinct free-form blather, each one of the six jams is in fact a totally separate document of a unique musical event. Valley Of Ashes are a large free-rock collective based in Louisville Kentucky and membership includes Pete Nolan of Magik Markers, Kris Abplanalp of Virgin Eye Blood Brothers, Wes Abplanalp, violinist Natalie Thompson, and others including members of Raw Thug and Kark. All three slabs of vinyl are housed in a single pocket sleeve, adorned with a lovely colour cover reproducing a painting which looks a bit like Matta, or Max Ernst.

ED PINSENT 05/11/2005

reasons, such as the greyness of the supernatural 'ghost' cover, and the appearance of my lucky owl symbol. Glad to have picked this LP up, though perhaps it may not be totally 'essential', nor does it have a rockin' bone in its grooves; instead, it trades in spooky in-the-dark atmospheres, obsessive monotony and repetition, starkly black-and-white electronic effects, and exploration of dark psychic zones. In places, it seems to me more like a slowed-down version of the only LP by French nutters The Metal Boys, one of my favourite records in this 'genre'. All improvised, mostly instrumental, sometimes with angsty lyrical content, this LP gets better the more I play it. In particular, the very last track 'Forbidden Ones' is one I would recommend most highly. Starting off with documentary tapes of the rich mix of ethnic voices to be found in Brooklyn, this strong and alarming piece of doomy mystery-minimalism uses spare voice loops, broken drum beats, and fractured electronic notes spat out at random to confound the listeners. A piece so restrained and tight-lipped as to come across like a sullen teenage brat, yet its overall effect is as potent as a magic charm against your enemies. Lovely hand-press and window mount presentation for the cover of this. To learn more, see the interview this ish.

ED PINSENT 05/11/2005

U W Owl

U W Owl
USA PHASERPRONE PPRA-001 LP (2005)

Ten fine tracks by the duo of Jonas Asher and Jochen Hartmann; in context of the batch of LPs raved about above, this one overlaps most closely with the Genders LP, but U W Owl occupy their own nightmarish patch of turf and they certainly unleash their own brand of fear-filled, baleful tension! Executed with primitive electronics, electric guitar, beatbox and wasted vocals, this mean-spirited beast had already earned comparisons with Throbbing Gristle according to the cover sticker when I saw it on the wall at Other Music in NYC. The friendly record clerk there offered me help, but when queried further about U W Owl all he could do was reiterate what was written on the cover sticker, ie that (in the opinion of Other Music staff) they sounded like Throbbing Gristle. In fact I was secretly drawn to it for other

The UTTER FREAKDOM

Warped-full, weird-full, wonderful-full

Adam Bohman

Bunhill Row

UK ANOTHER PARADIGM PD19 LP (2006)

Fantastic LP of 1980 cassette recordings by this certified UK genius. These miniaturist avant-pop songs, some lasting less than sixty seconds, make for an incredibly beguiling and intriguing listen. Everything fits right in with the recorded work of Sexton Ming and Viv Stanshall, especially in the very English subject matter, being dealt with in a very English way…the underlying gloom and pessimism, the rainy weather, the letters from the Council, the failing relationships, the landscape of miserable houses…it's all here in the dense and opaque content. Listen to songs like 'Irresponsible Parent Blues' or 'Melancholic Alcoholic' for proof that England's social problems haven't changed (or improved) much in the last 26 years. There's humour too – in 'Heavy Metal Halifax', or the hilarious 'Talkin' Bout Manilow', which takes social satire of the 'normals' to new depths, with its absurdist parody of shopgirls and secretaries gushing inanely about Barry's music in their Thames Estuary accents. Bohman's charmingly abrasive work from this period could be a missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle of early 1980s avant-garde post-punk crossover history, a zone that includes the *Miniatures* LP compiled by Morgan Fisher, The Door and The Window, and The 49 Americans – not to mention the history of DIY cassette bands…

Even bearing all the above in mind, you still won't be prepared for the unearthly sound of this LP. It's in the utterly unique singing style, the performance, and presentation of this music. There is clearly some preparation in the composition of the lyrics and song, and the recording method, yet in the finished product Bohman makes it sound so natural as though it had only just occurred to him. His singing style may not be a total shock if you've heard any of his wonderful spoken-word cassette recordings from his aural diary (also released by Paradigm, on 1999's *Music And Words* CD, and on compilations), but it may surprise some listeners…then there's his performative style, here deliberately restricted to playing acoustic instruments and based mainly on the acoustic guitar, trumpet, and recorder, but also including all manner of domestic objects and junk used as percussion (very English method this, connecting strongly to the work of Hugh Davies). Finally there's the recording method, involving astonishing use of degraded cassette tapes, battery-operated players, loops, and anything else that might contribute to the aesthetically-delightful obfuscation process. It takes the Mark E Smith aesthetic to the nth degree. I think it's here, it sounds beautifully raw, dirty, and mesmerising.

Brother Jonathan Bohman plays on one track; add to this the dazzling 'outsider art' sleeve by Adam, a nifty vinyl pressing, and we have a genuine masterpiece of grown-in-the-UK genius. It's a genuine pleasure for me to whole-heartedly recommend this LP to everyone. Welcome back, Paradigm.

ED PINSENT 21/11/2006

www.stalk.net/paradigm

Alan Sondheim and Ritual All 770

The Songs

USA FIRE MUSEUM RECORDS FM 04 CD (2005)

Great reissue of an all-American weirdie of free music; the original vinyl (on Riverboat Records) is I assume a staggering rarity and the music, now we get to hear it, is a useful and fascinating example of early-ish (1967) American free noise, most timely and welcome in today's climate. Experimental poet Alan Sondheim was the main instrumentalist, the man with the 'vision', and the leader of this small group of improvisers in Providence, Rhode Island – in 2006, of course, home to such luminaries as Lightning Bolt, Black Dice and mudboy. The players realised this continuous 40-minute performance (it's divided into 10 index points here) working to a semi-composed score by Sondheim. The man himself – I already picture him with a luxuriant growth of long brown hair, full beard, and ultra-cool horn-rim glasses poring over his scores – played a ton of unusual stringed instruments, percussion, and also puffed away on the reeds, while the team of wide-eyed fanatics in his drugged-up mob played bass, trumpet, drums, and tabla. And there were two vocalists, free-spirited youngsters informed to the hilt by the previous decade's beat culture, several bottles of

red wine and many a puff on the ancient herb. Initial bursts of playing this in between scanning the sleeve info with hungry eyes persuaded me this was gonna be some kind of 'ultimate' freak record.

Well, let's rein in the enthusiasm slightly. In fact Sondheim's instructional method of working was real composition-lite; a libretto was provided to the singers, but with absolutely no instructions on how to sing it. Musicians were given one single instruction, along the lines of not playing so loud that they might drown out the quieter acoustic instruments. Both of these notions have a Yankee ingenuity and pragmatism that we must admire. A few rehearsals took place before the recording, but mostly on a one-to-one basis – probably involving Sondheim visiting homes of the team, mentoring them before the big day. We've got shades of the Captain Beefheart working method with The Magic Band there, two years before *Trout Mask*. Like that record, the session for *The Songs* captured the whole album in just two takes. Sondheim added a small amount of reverb and mixage after the fact (the LP opens with an attention-grabbing flourish of echo), but otherwise what you hear is a pure document of live music.

So, the record you hear may not actually be as wild and crazy as all the above may lead you to expect. It's like a species of free jazz with added singing, vocalising which also defaults to a jazz-esque scat style in spite of strenuous efforts to sing 'free', and also lapses into blues idioms with tiresome ease. Despite this, it is mostly loveable, unaffected, warbling blurty bleat and blat. 'They delved fearlessly and joyously into their music', states the back cover sleeve note; and that joy comes over first and foremost, and is infectious. I think history will show the enthusiastic participants were early proponents of a process which ultimately led to the democratisation of free playing; they remained aware of 'proper' forms of experimentation in the semi-establishment worlds of classical and jazz music, and were too untutored to enter those rarefied realms; yet they weren't about to let this 'inability' stop them making their own music. This can-do attitude probably sounds familiar to all you lovers of punk rock, DIY music, The People Band, and today's free-for-all CDR release-anything culture; but let's not forget it was a much rarer commodity in 1967. No wonder this record is on the Nurse With Wound 'list' (but don't let that put you off)! The combo went on to make two further records for ESP-Disk in 1968 and 1969, an intriguing fact which will send me scuttling off to record lists or hoping for a reissue along these lines.

ED PINSENT 27/07/2006

www.museumfire.com

Gravity Adjusters Expansion Band

One

UK PARADIGM DISCS PD 20 CD (2006)

Clive Graham's highly unusual label returns with a new archival rescue project of sorts, this one reissuing a very obscure LP from 1973. The restoration job is thorough, including a bonus track on the audio and one original track republished at its full length, plus an eight-page booklet with a number of extraordinary

contemporary photographs, original sleeve notes, and a well-researched history of the Gravity Adjusters Expansion Band – alongside recent observations from one of the main men, Richard Waters. Interesting story to this generally overlooked collective, which began around 1967 in California as a meeting of friends and like minds, who remained musical outcasts with their uncategorisable approach to their work, and their rather open-ended membership. Yet they had some discernible influence over time and impressed many key figures in music and film with their instruments. This, their first LP, was called *One* and was issued by a Californian label called Nocturne Records; perhaps a little optimistic in their naming scheme, as *Two* never materialised and they didn't make another record until 1981.

There are so many components in the Gravity Adjusters Expansion Band it's hard to know where to begin. Richard Waters invented instruments; this is one of their core elements of distinction. His inventions were more akin to sound-sculptures than instruments, the principal device being the Waterphone. This 'stainless steel and bronze acoustic, tonal-friction instrument', according to its creator, 'uses water in the interior of a resonator to bend tones and create water echos'. Then there are other modified instruments also involving the use of water, such as the water gong drums. There is electronic music, sometimes produced with very basic oscillators. And there is free-jazz influenced percussion, provided by the drummer Lee Charlton. Paradigm have already noted the overlap between Gravity Adjusters Expansion Band and other contemporary underground improvisers who used home-made and adapted instruments, such as AMM, MEV and the Taj Mahal Travellers. For another possible forebear, I would add the records of Harry Bertoia to this list, that equally rugged US maverick with his barns full of furniture and metal sound sculptures, which could be more-or-less 'played' to produce unusual sounds.

Even so, listeners familiar with any of that material will still be taken aback by this utterly alien record. It's actually extremely delicate; anyone expecting something similar to the passionate clattery noise of MEV, for example, might be disappointed with *One*, whose sound-world is wispy, ethereal, and unfocussed. It will require several plays for your ears to get a purchase and for the sound to take hold. There is hardly a single familiar sound to be heard on the whole record, with the exception of the bonus track 'Shimmering' which adds a subdued piano figure to the morass of floaty weirdness. The other point to make is that, although presumably improvised, this record is not really musical at all: there are no arrangements, melodies, patterns, rhythms, or notes to speak of. It's just an array of sounds, of strangely textured washes.

Richard Waters, now firmly established as a multimedia artist based in Mississippi, remains proud of his unique (and patented) invention, the Waterphone. He claims 'the sound of the Waterphone has been compared to the haunting melodies of the Humpback Whale and voices from inner/outer space.' To enter that inner space, you need only listen to this CD.

ED PINSENT 13/11/2006

www.stalk.net/paradigm
www.richardawaters.com

Porest

Mood Noose

USA RESIPISCENT 006 CD (2005)

A completely uncategorisable collection of works by Californian Mark Gergis, his third full-length release and one of two new Porest items received this season. Here are 21 quite short pieces, each one as intense as a Kurt Schwitters collage, and packed with ideas fit to burst – explosive, wild, always bizarre, some of them deliberately rather nasty. A highly charged mixture of electronic music, samples, field recordings, spoken word elements, and whatnot; the CD's as volatile as a tumbler full of nitro-glycerine. Gergis lays down confusing and mismatched rhythms, textures and juxtapositions which, in places, aren't too far apart from the first Faust LP (and that is high praise indeed). And if there's any coherence at all to his scatter-gun statements, it's all proving that 'life is completely absurd' and that nothing else matters.

When you've stopped reeling from the audacity of it all, about midway through you might be able to take stock and observe the assurance and bravado, not to say the ingenuity, with which Porest creates these disorienting effects. He's out to deliver surprises, sure – but sonically speaking, every one of his mini-essays in sound is brittle and crisp, without relying on that vague 'droning murk' effect that so many artistes use these days to conceal their paucity of ideas. Nor is Gergis particularly interested in doing 'queasy' in the way that Stan Reed has made all his own. This is simply a set of sharp, crystal-clear statements of queer, troubling insanity. Realised with the help of the excellent Liz Allbee, and Erik Gergis. Mark Gergis is a key member of Mono Pause in the Bay Area, and its Asian spin-off project Neung Phak; has worked with cut-up maestros Negativland and People

Like Us; and has made at least one compilation of real-life recordings (*I Remember Syria*) for the Sublime Frequencies label. On evidence of this release, it's no wonder Sun City Girls like him! If he and Charles Gocher ever got together and compared anecdotes, the resulting record of profanity, cussin', and twisted nightmarish yarns would probably reek so much you could smell it in Boston, even when it was recorded in Seattle. And that's a compliment too. A truly American piece of stinky, slang-filled, idiomatic, sprawling dementia performed with gusto by a hyper-active gnostic control-freak.

ED PINSENT 09/08/2006

www.resipiscent.com

Porest

Tourrorists!

USA ABDUCTION RECORDS ABDT034 CD (2006)

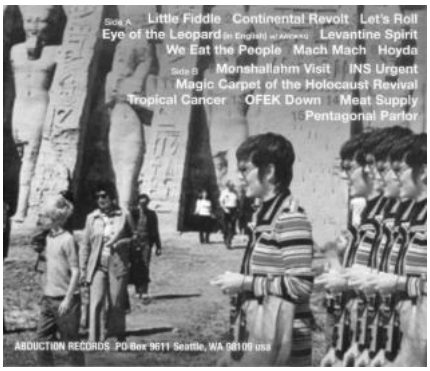
In which Mark Gergis turns his absurdist eye on such burning topical issues as global terrorism, 9/11, suicide bombers and, shall we say, the exigencies of US foreign policy in the Middle East. He activates his skewed barbs by juxtaposing all the above elements with images from the world of tourist culture, and the title of the CD neatly compresses everything of his intentions into a single compound word whose exclamation mark denotes both his outrageous sense of humour, and the rather alarming urgency of his message. The title may also be a dig at President Bush, whose Texan accent distorts the word 'terrorists' into 'tourists' in the majority of broadcasts; I'm indebted to our own Rory Bremner for spotting this connection.

If you want jet-black humour and nasty satire, Gergis never fails to satisfy here. The outright satirical and humourous half of this CD is spoken word, *detourned* by the cut-up method, very much in the People Like Us / Negativland vein. In this way. the inanities of travel and tourism – particularly American tourism – are ruthlessly parodied and exposed, and juxtaposed with gratuitous material about smuggling explosives through customs and remarks like 'God bless the terrorists.' These set-pieces may be staged and performed by actors; they may be clever assemblages derived from genuine clandestine tapes, or they may be samples of TV/radio cleverly manipulated to make the point. However they're done, all pieces in this vein are darkly subversive and are purposely designed to shock, upset and undermine. Your sense of 'good taste' will be the first victim, followed by your grasp on reality. The whole CD is spiked with these anti-personnel mines.

On the other hand, Gergis is also very musical. Other half of CD comprises wild instrumental music and songs, whose infectious rhythms, speed, and competence in instrumental prowess are so polished as to appear nigh-impossible. These musical pieces, like 'Hoyda', 'Levantine Spirit' and 'Continental Revolt' are all immaculate (and totally crazy) arrangements of manic dimensions, executed and played superbly by Gergis with the help of Jerry Blue, Liz Allbee, Erik Gergis, Peter Valsamis and George Cremaschi. The Finnish band Aaaviko guest on 'Eye of the Leopard', one of several pieces notable for its out-to-shock lyrics. The fact that we're being invited to laugh at the content of a song like this makes it very hard for a listener to

know where to put themselves.

It remains to mention the nasty and unsubtle collage images in the quadruple gatefold insert and tray; not an inch of space is lost as Gergis lays out his Heartfield-like montages with their up-to-the-minute observations. The visual equivalent of the musical contents, they will not leave a nice taste in your mouth, and any US readers of TSP who remain sensitive about 9/11 are advised to give this CD a wide berth. To spare your feelings, I have chosen not to reproduce the front cover art in this magazine. Whatever choice you make, I'm sure Gergis will



be chuckling to himself as his main intention is probably to draw a strong reaction from his audience. I maintain however that there's some great music on here, and even if you don't like his messages, there is much to admire in the taut economy with which he makes his guerrilla raids on the cultural landscape.

ED PINSENT 15/10/2006

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The Inside of the Outside / or the Outside of the Inside

Who are they? Where do they come from? Why are they here?

USA CREELPONE CREELP ENGLER CD (ND)

Golly, do I have a few questions for the Creelpone Guy: Who was this 1960s group of musicians who didn't know their insides from their outsides? Where did they come from? Did they ever record a follow-up in which all their questions were answered? And most importantly, did these fellas ever work out where and when inside becomes outside and vice versa? Well if Mr Keith Creelpone Fullerton Whitman does have the answers, I'm sure they might well tarnish the wacky charm of this recording originally released on vinyl in 1965: the only indication as to who might have composed and played these mostly short tracks (18 of 19 tracks run at less than three minutes each) is the tiny but terse print on the CD sleeve reproduction of the original album cover which says that George Engler composed all pieces apart from 'Konjugationen' the nine-minute tapestry of electronic sounds composed by Heinz Karl Gruber. Apart from this bit of handy information, there's nothing else on the CD that says how many musicians and who might have been involved in the making of the record so one assumes George Engler and friend probably did it all themselves.

The music itself could be said to be ambient music of a spacey and industrial kind; each track is titled descriptively in a general way: 'Swarm of Insects, 'Industry' and 'Metallurgy' to take a few examples so you get a vague idea of what each track is about. Apart from 'Konjugationen' which definitely sounds like a mix of various electronic instruments, all pieces involve the use of familiar acoustic instruments like pianos, trumpets and various woodwinds used in unfamiliar ways so as to suggest utterly alien objects. Initially it may sound all electronic but closer listening reveals that clever editing, splicing, various field recordings, speeding up the tape here and there (as on tracks like 'Hectic' and 'Sparkling Particles') and various other studio recording techniques have done the trick of creating an alien-sounding soundtrack. Melodies and rhythms do appear but for a short time and seem to emphasise the hitherto unknown alter egos of the instruments used. Only the final track 'Sounds of Venus' resembles anything like what many imagine ambient music to be: a very pleasant tone poem piece that finishes off the recording nicely.

As mentioned before and in common with other Creelpone releases, the CD sleeve merely reproduces the original vinyl record front and back covers; the back cover features 'Dialogue in Space' in which two unnamed astronauts chat about some little alien visitors to Earth. In common with the music, the prose piece is interesting with some ideas that are quite inspired if eccentric but is quite firmly rooted in the social and cultural context of the period in which the original vinyl recording was made. Not a brilliant recording on the whole but the idea of using familiar instruments and recording techniques to create something very unusual is worthy in itself.

JENNIFER HOR

www.mimaroglumusicsales.com
www.reckankomplex.com

Cellutron and the Invisible

Reflecting on the First Watch, We Uncover Treasure Buried for the Blind

USA CREELPONE CREELP CELLUTRON CD (ND)

Apparently inspired by the Holy Ghost was this 1978 recording that seems to combine interstellar communication with aliens and Biblical prophecy which in a way isn't that crazy an idea. How many religious cults have there been that posited aliens from outer space with angels and vice versa? I'll wager that there are too many such cults to count. Various musicians answering to the names of Cellutron, Indiana Straight, RSG (this would be one Robert S Greeley who conceived the album's concept and produced and co-engineered it), Spaceboy and, on one segment 'Borderline Radio Transmission', D and A Tsiorbas (I would think they really are called D and A Tsiorbas and not DNA Tsiorbas but ha ha that's a good joke from you TSP readers) have created quite a playful soundtrack for an imaginary film using a digital sequencer, electric and acoustic guitars and on the aforementioned segment percussion and keyboards. Noises and special effects and little snippets of electronic sound sequences that might almost have become melodies zip across the firmament in a carefree and joyful on 'Alien Activity in the 45th Parallel'. The next track is slightly more serious with a quasi-mystical air thanks to a moody wandering electric guitar accompanied by a throbbing drone and a waterfall of effects. 'Parisian Frequency Shift' which comes after is divided into eight named segments of which we've met 'Borderline ...' and is very minimalist and sort of disconnected with sequences of spacey noises floating by and at one point interrupted by RSG doing a weird space hobo busking act with acoustic guitar and out-of-tune singing. The fourth and last track 'Reap the Whirlwind' brings back the electric guitar briefly before going all-electronic with silvery high-pitched tones doing seemingly quite elementary stuff like climbing and descending musical scales while a rhythm bounces about in the background and fading in and out. This track wanders all over the place without seeming to reach much of a resolution before the sequencer finishes off the album by climbing back down the musical scale and jumping off a low note.

While the concept is entertaining and a lot can be made of it, the music as a whole is let down by that last track which is rather ordinary and doesn't advance the musical experimentation and the record's concept much. Moments of wackiness and guitar psychedelia seem promising but I feel much potential on this album remains unrealised.

JENNIFER HOR

www.mimaroglumusicsales.com
www.reckankomplex.com

Vagina Dentata Organ

The Great Masturbator

UK W.S.N.S. 2004 003 CD CD (2004)

Jordi Valls pays tribute to his mentor Salvador Dalí, in his latest release which again manages to

compress a multitude of ideas into an integrated art-and-music package. 'Since I was very young, I always felt close to Surrealism, and very connected to Dalí's work,' he told this magazine in 2003. 'When I'm in Catalonia my home is in Cadaqués, the epicentre of Surrealism, a place with very strong cosmic and telluric magnetism. In fact, the landscape is like a painting by Salvador Dalí, he lived there.' Accordingly not an inch of the CD artwork space is wasted as Valls issues this highly-personal love-letter to the Catalan painter and drops many knowing hints and clues as to the meaning of his work.

Oddly enough for one whose trademark in the past has been a respectful and mysterious anonymity, Valls makes a personal appearance in virtually every photograph; the cover shows him standing in front of the Dalí painting which has given its name to this CD. Except it's not the original painting, rather a billboard / public art copy of same. In each shot of the surrounding district of the photo shoot (which could be the Salvador Dalí museum in Figueres, where Dalí's embalmed body is lies in a crypt), there stands Valls looking 'cool' in his black jacket and dark shades, getting in the way; tourist snapshots from Snappy Snaps would look less banal. I gather he's done something similar with his home-movie footage of the pagan drums in the Spanish village of Calanda (which he's also released as a record). The CD is printed with a closeup photo of a fake fur rug, making a connection to Man Ray's fur teacup (itself a knowing visual pun on oral sex). Slightly more interesting are the references made to the painting of St John of the Cross in a public toilet; and a photo of Dalí's tombstone, to which is appended the extremely crass caption 'The Dog's Bollocks'. Hmm! This of course is a reference to *Un Chien Andalou*, the early Surrealist cinema masterpiece which was 'scripted' by Dalí and filmed by Luis Bunuel; 'Dalí is the real Catalan dog,' states Valls. Besides all the genital, scatological and sexual references mentioned in passing above, there's a clever detail on the back cover which (by comparison)

is so subtle you almost miss it. Valls is standing in front of a Casino with the Great Masturbator in the background; and the phrase 'PAY AS YOU ENTER' precedes the written credits printed on the sleeve. This seems to have more to do with prostitution (paying for sex) than with masturbation, but it's still another neatly-compacted dirty joke inflated into a form of art statement, a tactic at which Valls excels.

Then I played the disc. Well, the sound is simply a recording of a lone church bell striking two different notes for about an hour, and it will probably drive you up the wall. I never got to the end of it. Compared with this his other releases, including my favourite one which is noises of a motorbike engine, start to appear positively rich in their sonic variety. Of course the main thing with Valls is not the sounds he makes on the finished product, but the integrity and strength of his complex concepts, which achieve a certain notoriety and indelibility as they pass into underground culture, and sometimes into legend. Quite often there's a deep back-story to all of his actions, which are highly specific and layered with additional meanings, and the recording as issued represents maybe 5% of his activity. In this instance, I think I used to know why the bell was significant and how it connected to the life and times of this perennial favourite painter, but now I forget. In his strenuous efforts to be surreal and Freudian, Jordi may be marking time with this one; it all seems a little too 'obvious' somehow. After his previous powerful blast, *The Perpignan Killings*, which layered extracts from his 'greatest hits' together into one nightmarishly sickening wodge of noise, this much quieter piece arrives as a strong contrast, but also as something of an ineffectual disappointment. Still, there's no denying the depth of Valls' feeling of attachment to his chosen subject.

ED PINSENT 13/08/2006

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Stan Reed / Gregor Jabs / Frank Rowenta

Apoplexia 1973. A musical Research

USA PSYCHFORM RECORDS PFR07 / GERMANY JEANS RECORDS 01 CD (2006)

This is American Stan Reed (who also records as The Broken Penis Orchestra and Plethora) and the two German guys Frank Rowenta and Gregor Jabs who are Grillhaus. If we can believe a single word of the accompanying propaganda, the starting point for the composers was old reel to reel tapes of interviews between doctors and apoplexia patients, from the psychiatric institute Klinischen Anstalten in Aachen; said tapes were made in 1973. Continuing the theme, the striking cover photo depicts a patient with electrodes strapped to her head and her eyes tight shut. Mental illness seems to be an 'attractive' topic to certain experimental musicians; I can think of recent records by The Haters and John Everall, but also sense that it can be found as far back as the 1980s in the music of Nurse With Wound, Throbbing Gristle, and others of that school.

Apoplexia 1973's source material is certainly in evidence – we hear German voices which are presumably doctors inviting patients to talk about their symptoms, and hesitant replies from the sufferers. Surrounding these components are outlandish constructs of electronic music and a multitude of samples, quite often achieving the condition of hysterical, over-crowded mayhem across nine alarming tracks. At best, the effects of distortion and the random selection of information can lead to moments of real mental terror for the listener; at other times, we almost enter the strange and lonely world of a mentally ill person. Whether you find this approach sympathetic or exploitative is your own business. The musical excitement catches fire best in the dynamics of contrasting tracks; one episode packed with event – such as a soundscape suggestive of maddened crowds enjoying a dark carnival – is juxtaposed with a simple example of a treated voice tape. We almost get the equivalent of *Shock Corridor* in sound. At worst, the musicians just overdo everything, piling on far too much unrelated and excessive material for far too long a time, resulting in the kind of soggy production found on the 2004 Grillhaus LP.

ED PINSENT 26/07/2006

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Liz Allbee

Quarry Tones
USA RESIPISCENT RSPT001 CD (2005)

Quirky solo record (her first) from this loopy Californian trumpet woman. She plays in local groups Le Flange Du Mal, MurderMurder and Diatric Puds. Here, using trumpet playing, a pitchfork mouthpiece, vocalising, and breathing as the raw material, liberal sampling and digital FX, she creates looping rhythms, odd melodies, and puzzling sounds. Queasy, clunky, anti-techno horrors issue forth, all extremely twisted and ill-sounding. The phrawrping rhythms and darkly-sweet melodies, with their deliberately off-key wonky notes, may put you in mind of digital-era Residents. She also favours vaguely surreal track titles for these abstracted confections, such as 'Fanfare The Goad Offal Ages', and the package arrives in a grey felt pouch like something hand-sewn by Joseph Beuys. You should use contents of said pouch sparingly, as a general antidote to normality. Allbee is no slouch, a sharp and gifted musician with a highly developed personality and a warped sense of humour, which tends to make her a perfect accompanist for Porest (see elsewhere this ish), Mono Pause, Sun City Girls and many others. The label Resipiscent is based in San Francisco – need I say more!

ED PINSENT 08/10/2006

www.lizallbee.net

M.S. Waldron, Steven Stapleton, Sigtryggur Berg Sigmarsson, Jim Haynes, R. K. Faulhaber

The Sleeping Moustache
USA THE HELEN SCARSDALE AGENCY HMS007 CD (2006)

Four contemporary avant musicians join forces with Steven Stapleton and somehow manage to arrive at a totally bogus, contrived and lame-oid 'Surrealist' record. A paint-by-numbers piece of underground electronic improvisation, which just reeks of insincerity, manipulation, and cynical button-pushing. Those involved: Jim Haynes of Coelacanth, the US writer and conceptual artist who likes rusty objects; the offbeat electronica guy, M.S. Waldron who is irr. app. (ext.); the lesser-known R. K. Faulhaber; and Sigtryggur Berg Sigmarsson from the Icelandic duo Stilluppsteypa. Individually, these people have done good things; and I'm fully aware who Stapleton is and that many regard him as a god of the underground. But this smug, back-slapping record is hateful. I hate every minute of the aimless gloop this foursome produce, the gloomy caste of the music, its pointless swoops, shuffles and sweeps, with no sense whatsoever of tune, structure or meaning. I hate the utterly silly and pseudo-Surreal track titles, which are intended to shock us yet are about as menacing as the titles for a Tim Burton film. And I hate the letterpress package of it, which knowingly aspires to the condition of a DADA tract. Yet the true Dadaists would have spotted this immediately for what it is – opportunistic bourgeois hypocrisy. This stinking release is a synthetic contrivance from top to bottom…loathsome fake art, which aims to generate an hour-long psychologically-rich nightmare, and simply delivers an unpleasant bout of sonic indigestion. What an abomination!

ED PINSENT 10/07/2006

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The Church Universal and Triumphant Inc., featuring Elizabeth Clare Prophet

The Sounds of American

Doomsday Cults
USA FAITHWAYS INTERNATIONAL CDSOUNDVOL14 CD [2005]

Yikes! Here be the CD reissue of the famous recordings made in 1984 by the apocalyptic and syncretistic Christian / New Age Church Universal and Triumphant, Inc, led at the time by the charismatic lady Elizabeth Clare Prophet who was believed by her followers to be divinely inspired by various assorted Ascended Masters such as Jesus Christ, the Archangel Michael, Hercules and Merlin of King Arthur and the Round Table fame. Listening to these recordings though, some unkind and obviously lesser souls might think that the good lady was inspired on a more prosaic level by horse race callers or auctioneers on speed abetted by the demon that tormented Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*: many passages feature E C Prophet and her unidentified fellow male preacher on these recordings speaking and chanting away in indecipherable babble as though in a trance or possessed by ... well, you can guess. On one level these recordings are some of the loopiest ever put to tape, vinyl or disc, very amusing and entertaining and quite demented; on another level, they can be troubling and sinister especially to someone who grew up in an evangelical Protestant Christian environment as I did and who is familiar with the notion of people being visited by the Holy Ghost and suddenly speaking and praising God in various unknown tongues. It's as well to remember that while the two preachers are gibbering hell for leather in their crusade against the demon rock and pop music and MTV, their congregation is just as breathlessly following the dynamic duo in their chanting and the constant rhythmic babble is hypnotic and droning and in its own way sort of seductive. There's an element of pathos as well in that the people on these recordings are completely earnest in their battle against rock and pop music (the recordings seem to be of one church service dedicated to purging the world of this malign influence but doubtless many other issues preoccupied E C Prophet and her flock on other occasions) and expend a lot of energy and passion in their crusade yet while the music industry happily and innocently continued on its particular corrupt path, a series of financial and other scandals befell the leaders of the Church Universal and Triumphant, the membership eventually dwindled though the Church still survives and E C Prophet herself retired in the late 1990s and (irony of ironies) is reportedly suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Probably the most amusing parts of this CD are in the latter two thirds which include the invocation for judgement against and destruction

of rock music in which the male preacher reads out a list of 'fallen angels' which turns out to include the wholesome singer Olivia Newton-John (hands up those of you TSP readers who thought ONJ conceived her daughter via immaculate parthenogenesis instead of through the usual way) and the equally harmless Billy Joel among others, and track 7 in which E C Prophet appears to channel alien recordings like a high-pitched radio transmitter (Joe Banks would be thrilled) and exhorts the congregation to do likewise! Track 6 also is a virtuoso performance in which the preachers chant and gabble full bore for nearly 30 minutes and even seem to speed up at various intervals towards the end with the congregation hard on their heels.

Those who find this album fascinating are likely to be those people who are able to appreciate the recordings both as entertainment and as a sober reminder of people's capacity to delude themselves and to surrender responsibility for their lives and their children's lives to equally self-deluded and often manipulative and narcissistic others.

JENNIFER HOR

References: The Summit Lighthouse (official website of The Church Universal and Triumphant Inc.): www.tsl.org
Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Clare_Prophet

Rodd Keith

Saucers in the Sky
USA ROARATORIO ROAR 10 CD (2005)

Had Rodney Keith Eskelin (aka Rodd Keith) not chosen to work in the genre of song-poems (aka song sharking) which was (still is?) the music industry equivalent of vanity publishing, he might have come to notice much earlier during his lifetime. Aspiring wannabe-songwriters dreaming of fame and fortune in the 1950s-70s saw advertisements for 'song-poems' or lyrics in the back pages of various comics and magazines and accordingly sent lyrics of an often intense and naive nature (but also all too often boring, uninspired or banal) to the companies that placed the advertisements, who hired professional musicians such as Keith to compose the music, work out the arrangements and perform the songs. The songs themselves would be put to vinyl and the song-poem writers would be advised to pay a fee to get copies and to have the records played on radio. Although in truth very, very few such songs ever made it live on air, due either to the nature of the lyrics or the actual recordings themselves which were often listless and mechanical in execution or contained music that had been used over and over for different song-poems. As a result, no-one in the music industry took them at all seriously. Of the professional musicians who worked in the song-poem industry in North America, Keith is one of the few who stand out for his obvious talent in singing, composing and playing in a variety of different music styles, some of which complement the often god-awful lyrics he had to work with, and some of which deliberately don't, and yet do so anyway because of the tension generated by the contrast between music and words.

Due to this variety of vocal and performance

styles Keith employed on converting the song-poems into actual songs, I'll go through a selection of tracks from the album - there are 26 songs in all - and detail what I find most interesting and enjoyable, at least to me anyway - as I'm sure you all know far too well, I have a very black sense of humour:

'Lettuce and Lace': a tale of thwarted love (lust?) with a very convincing vocal imitation of harmonica at the end

'You Only Want To Hurt Me': Elvis Presley-style vocal which also appears on a number of other songs on this comp

'Saucers in the Sky': UFO-inspired piece about wanting to fly in your own saucer the American way! - sung and performed in a dated style that makes me think of black American musicians in rural southern US states playing their own version of jazz or proto-jazz / ragtime in the 1920s - 30s

'Sawdust': very funny mood piece revealing a baker's scam in which the subject profits from other people's misery and deaths by putting virus(?)-filled sawdust into baker's dough

'Here Comes The Judge': Keith does three (yes, three!) singing voices: a judge, a cute little kid (gotta love that squeak!) and the James Brown-styled narrator in a pseudo-soul piece

'A Soothing Dream, But ...': surreal lyrics ruled this song out of Top 40 contention and Keith gives it an appropriately psychedelic touch

'The Merry-Go-Down': an apparently innocuous pop style with lyrics that give no indication of how the narrator plans to get off the merry-go-down as a result of being ditched by his girlfriend and so the whole set generates a tension between the music and lyrics, and assumes a dark edge at the end

'It's Raining': Jimi Hendrix-styled vocal with an accompaniment that includes drums and organ but ... no electric guitar! - there's also a very biting punchline (many songs on this compilation often have a punchline at the very end which casts the entire piece and the otherwise insipid lyrics in a very different light and I wonder whether this might have been Keith's doing)

'Cancel My Order For Love': second verse seems really quite perverse with the mention of a statuesque mannequin!

'Telephone Call': I just love this song, it's very catchy and has a steady beat in a Beatlesque kind of way though the singing is nothing like The Beatles

'Get On My Honda, Rhonda': Mick Jagger meets Blood, Sweat and Tears presentation featuring an acid guitar and enthusiastic girl singers all keen to ride pillion on the Honda bike

'Ravens': twisted lyrics that would not be out of place on a goth doom or black metal record (one verse describes in gruesome detail how a dead man's skull gets picked over by the ravens) get a surprisingly intimate singer-songwriter-at-the-piano treatment ... I couldn't stop laughing at the devious humour behind the song, this is definitely one of his best on this recording

'Ship For Home': gospel song in which Keith's vocal performance veers between the merely fanatical and the downright demented only to go off the deep end completely when he realises that to fly the ship 'home' (that is, heaven), he has to, er ... well you can guess ... starts with 'd', need I spell it all out? ... one of my favourites on this compilation.

What's obvious in many of these songs is Keith's own enthusiasm for singing and playing the music even if the lyrics themselves were jaw-droppingly dreadful and banal ('Los Angeles City Lights' for example) and he seems to have found particular delight in giving quite demented pieces like 'Ravens' and 'Sawdust' the most diametrically opposed musical treatments (soothing or inviting intimacy) and in combining unlikely vocal and musical styles as on 'Get On My Honda, Rhonda': such treatment gives the songs an edginess Keith's musical colleagues in the song-poem industry would or could not have imagined. Imagine that each day you were under pressure to make hundreds of recordings of song-poems with uninspired lyrics contributed by bored housewives, pensioners, labourers and people in dead-end jobs or down-and-out types waffling about their lives or their pet doggies and you too wouldn't be too inspired to do the lyrics much justice.

Unfortunately for Keith (he died falling from a highway overpass in 1974 a few days shy of his 38th birthday, either due to drug-fuelled larking about or an actual attempt at suicide) and many of the lyricists who sent in song-poems, all this music remained obscure until the 1990s when it came to the attention of collectors and musicologists like Phil Milstein (who collated a CD I have previously reviewed, *Dion McGregor Screams Again*, oops, I mean *Dion McGregor Dreams Again*), Greg Turkington and Jello Biafra who are credited on *Saucers in the Sky*, so it is only in the last 10 years or so that Rodd Keith has received any kind of acclaim. In addition to this Roaratorio release, Tzadik has released two CDs of music by Keith, *Ecstacy (sic) in Frenzy* and *I Died Today*, in its Lunatic Fringe category.

Highly recommended if you like seemingly harmless and saccharine music that on closer inspection harbours the most twisted and deranged sentiments and if the idea of Jimi Hendrix singing with no electric guitar accompaniment, a group of poverty-stricken agricultural labourers singing about riding in their own UFOs or Mick Jagger actually meeting a gaggle of Honda-hopping girlies tickles your fancy. I might note here as well that the song-poems represent an insight into the concerns of the ordinary, often marginalised, people of the time and in that sense are important historical documents in themselves.

JENNIFER HOR

www.roaratorio.com
www.tzadik.com

The CRACKLING ESTHER

Electronic Music and electronica

Rothkamm

FB01

USA FLUX RECORDS CD (2006)

German-born Franz Rothkamm, currently living in NYC, has produced a clever and witty 'pastiche' of many forms of early electronic music, blending the results with quite blatant science-fiction themes evoked by titles and cover imagery. This is always of interest to me, because whenever I mention (under duress, I might add) my interest in electronic music to the chattering classes, the inevitable response is that I must also love science fiction movies from the 1950s, because 'they all had electronic soundtracks. And they all used the Theremin, didn't they?' The most common misunderstanding is that the *Forbidden Planet* soundtrack was made using a Theremin, but any attempts I make to clear up this misconception with an interlocutor usually end up with both of us out on the street in a brawl. Maybe Franz got fed up with dealing with the same banalities too, and decided he may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

The FB01 of the title allegedly refers to a digital synthesizer created by Yahama in 1986. As far as I know this is a complete fiction and no such device of this name was ever made. Rothkamm has selected this instrument as his weapon of choice, or perhaps I should say his transport vehicle; his dense sleeve notes allude to 'instruments as spacecrafts'. Overall his work seems to be a strenuous attempt to soup up the music of the Cologne school, by which I mean that school of thought that insisted on 'pure' electronic sounds (ie created entirely by machines, not based on nature in any way) to further the cause of modern music in the 20th century. Images of the FB01 also appear in the booklet, along with images of printed circuit boards, a spaceman in gold (not unlike Thomas Jerome Newton in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*), and a pulp science-fiction painting of astronauts attacking giant Lizard Men on a hostile planet surface. These Lizard Men are also referenced in the sleeve notes (whose tone I find is becoming increasingly tongue-in-cheek, despite surface appearance of academic seriousness), and in track 10 'Binary Rhythms of the Lizard People'. Perhaps Mr Rothkamm is making some veiled comment about contemporary human society; after all, film director Don Siegel (who made the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) continued to believe firmly that vast numbers of the population have already allowed themselves to be transformed into 'pods', those mindless and emotionless zombies which are bent on taking over the earth.

Still, even if he is implying the rest of us are all a bunch of cold, scaly reptiles, little of this barbed social satire is in evidence on Rothkamm's charming record, which I would categorise associatively as 'future nostalgia' music. Readers in the UK who are old enough to remember 'Bleep and Booster' on the *Blue Peter* show, and have distant memories of the electronic music sourced from the BBC Record Library to accompany its outer-space images, may understand what I mean. Six long tracks of Rothkamm's music are sandwiched in between four-second samples of 'source code' material; science-fiction readers may fantasise freely as to what is happening to their brains as this source code is implanted via the ears. A strangely compelling record, in spite of its near-total lack of structure and apparent superficiality...it's all rather pleasant but also a little pointless. I see volume two has just arrived in the mail, so will have to let you know if this measures up.

ED PINSENT 06/08/2006

www.fluxrecords.com
www.rothkamm.com

Kawabata Makoto

Your Voice From The Moon

POLAND VIVO RECORDS

vivo2005018CD CD (2005)

A somewhat non-typical release from the prolific leader of Acid Mothers Temple, forsaking his guitar for an electronic instrument and allowing himself the self-indulgence of a solo release; how it ended up on this obscure Polish label is a mildly perplexing question. The cover photo clues you in from the start, exhibiting the usual spot-on pastiche of 1970s album cover art and showing Makoto sitting hairy and cross-legged in a park with bright sunlight, green trees and grass, next to his organ firm and erect and on prominent display. 'Pastiche' is a word which might also apply to the musical contents, which amount to a feast of moog and theremin-like sounds, liberally enhanced with oodles of space echo and reverb. He aims for the 'outer space' vibe guaranteed to ring bells in the minds of his audience, and nails it every time with these three long tracks. Buttons are being pushed with the track titles too: 'Love on the Galactic Railroad' isn't far from the omniverse of Sun Ra, while 'Planet Crazy Diamond' is an obvious reference to Syd's Pink Floyd (or rather to Roger Water's tribute song to Barrett). As far as I know Syd never recorded a moog solo in his life, but Makoto doesn't care – in his mind, he's recreating the sound of the Floyd's UFO Club live sets of 1966-67!

If detail on sleeve photo be correct, he's actually playing an Electro Comp synth, an uncommon piece of vintage gear originally manufactured by Electronic Music Laboratories in Vernon, Connecticut. The Electro Comp had a two-note capacity with one of its oscillators going to a high note, the other going low. This tended to make it slightly more versatile than a Moog; so says keyboardist from Manfred Mann's Earth Band, and he ought to know. Makoto certainly creates a compelling surface sound with his Electro Comp, but on this CD at least he has only two modes: slow and tedious droning on a single chord, or excessive free-form soloing with wild and whirling effects. 'Love on the Galactic Railroad' is in the former mode, although with its stereo cross-fades it's also quite a hypnotic 'throbber'. The other two tracks are in the latter crazy mode and they just soar up and down a musical scale like a kid playing on a see-saw. Described cutely as 'musique cosmique electro-acoustique', this CD is mostly a glob of sickening formless goo.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2006

www.vivo.pl
www.acidmothers.com

Anthony Pateras / Robin Fox

Flux Compendium

AUSTRIA EDITIONS MEGO eMEGO 080 CD (2006)

First release on Peter Rehberg's showcase label Editions Mego. Pateras and Fox are a couple of Australian funsters who recorded this mostly in Melbourne during 2005. They serve up nine extremely varied cuts of electronic malarkey using computers, software, mixing desk, sampled voice tapes, and the good old Synthi A – a veteran piece of analogue equipment which in their hands is like a 1920s Bentley driven by two joy-riders tanked up with cheap lager and spliff. On available evidence, they'll sample anything in furtherance of their aims – from spinning coins on a Formica top to their own moaning voices, then proceed to atomise these samples into constituent parts, thread them into long strings, and weave a crazy quilt pattern of music and sonic explorations. When played back, general effect is one of relentless speed and forward movement, even for the quieter pieces. Some quiet droning murmurations, some noisy, restless and impatient assemblages of half-formed thoughts and instantly crossed-out ideas. A lot of humour abounds, including a childish pleasure in what they coyly refer to as 'bodily

functions and dysfunctions', and a certain delight is taken in setting these conundrums in sound, these somewhat illogical statements that make very little sense and have no direction. Much the same infuriating anti-logic is to be found in genuine Fluxus work, whose outpourings may be referenced by title of this work. LP length, a fairly lively and abrasive example of this genre.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2006

www.editionsmego.com
www.anthonypateras.com

Holger Hiller and Thomas Fehlmann

Wir Bauen eine Stadt

GERMANY GAGARIN RECORDS GR 2017 LP (2006)

This is an electronic and analogue synth rendering of a 1930 suite of music by Paul Hindemith, *Wir Bauen Eine Stadt*, and it's 12 minutes of sheer delight. The original libretto (by Robert Seitz) seems to have been derived from children's games, and it's great to hear the way our two contemporary musicians deliver the voice parts totally deadpan, with the serious precision that only a German can manage, even when solemnly intoning 'Here comes the baker' and other innocent frivolities. The taut precision of the melodies are an object lesson to us all, and thankfully not a trace of the Walter Carlos 'classics played on the synth' syndrome is in evidence; rather it's more like something digital-era Residents would have come up with, particularly in the matter of one-minute duration, and the economy of the ditties. It's also impossible to ignore the vague and delightful underlying sensations of mayhem and madness, as befits this composer who had Dada

associations (he performed, along with Satie, Duchamp, Hans Richter and others in René Clair's *Entr'Acte* film) and was also an enthusiastic modernist of the early 20th century – he composed works for cinema and radio and electronic instruments, besides numerous classical concertos and chamber pieces. German musician Holger Hiller, meanwhile, should be known to many in the UK for his releases on Cherry Red and Mute since the 1980s, although I never collected any of them; his main achievement is to have cultivated some mainstream success while remaining true to the principles of the avant-garde. On strength of these 12 minutes alone, it's hard to dispute his claim.

ED PINSENT 29/10/2006

www.gagarinrecords.com

Pylône

Black Grains

FRANCE SOUND ON PROBATION SOP 004 CD (2006)

Solo disc of very good chuntering digital monotony; strangely compelling, perhaps because Pylône wisely declines to vary his single-minded linear approach over course of one hour. The 25-minute 'Transmission' is particularly effective; the aural equivalent of an Ordnance Survey map. Unlike a record of open-ended improvised feedback, this material all feels like it's meticulously planned in advance, to be executed relentlessly by anonymous machines. A 'gridline' classic, in other words. Keep it alongside your CDs by Ryoki Ikeda, Carsten Nicolai, and Akira Yamamichi.

ED PINSENT 20/07/2006

www.soundonprobation.com

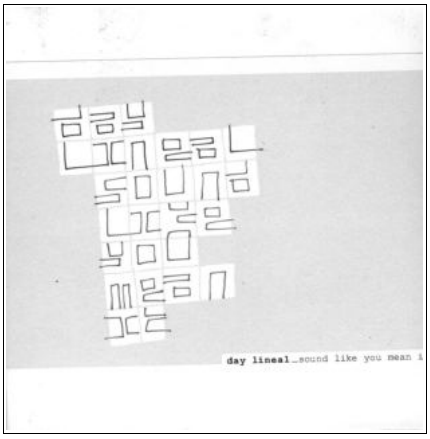
Day Lineal

Sound Like You Mean it

UK NO LABEL CDR (2005)

I should begin by saying that in almost all circumstances the sort of minimal, lower case, glitchy electronica business that has been exceedingly popular in recent years leaves me somewhat cold. The abstractness of it all perhaps, the renouncing of reality, or just the all-round earnestness involved that's so early modernism, whatever it is, it's fair to say that I just haven't dug it. A pleasant surprise then comes in the form of this little number, by the look of the album's cover something that belongs firmly in one of the aforementioned categories, but once slipped into the play position proves to be oh so much more.

Day Lineal's secret seems to lie in the fact that a good deal of their raw material, if not all in fact, is quite obviously drawn from the dirty, festering world they find themselves implicated in. Snippets of vaguely recognizable sounds come and go, all just before you can put your finger on them Others are more abstract, but for some reason they sound annoyingly familiar anyway. This sonic melange is then fed into the group's homebuilt processing circuitry, clearly powered by a team of hamsters, to produce the final result, glorious in its way, although that's probably not the adjective they're aiming for.



It's low-key and lo-fi. In places it reminded me vaguely of the Tennis album of a few years back, *Furlines*, although I think I like this better. It's abstract, to be sure, but it's not cold at all, in fact it's rather cosy. Unfortunately for us, there seems to be very little information as to who Day Lineal are, or just what their sonic modus operandi is. Their last offering was way back in 2001, and this small masterpiece was five years in the making. They truly seem to be enigmas in a world of celebrities. I for one feel just a little happier knowing they are out there.

AARON ROBERTSON

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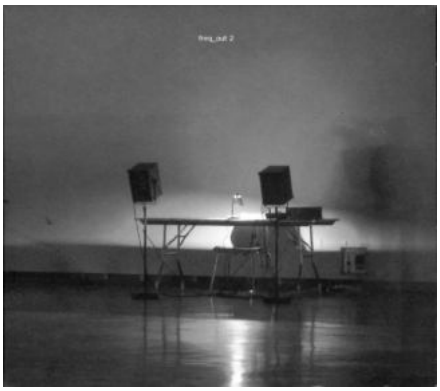
www.daylineal.co.uk

Various

freq_out 2
UK ASH INTERNATIONAL # 6.8 CD (2005)

An hour-long disc of continuous electronic droning with some light noise and glitch effects. Sheesh, what a total yawner! This ineffectual, dozy project may have involved the use of laptop computers, although that's merely an informed guess. Those responsible for doing it are many Swedes, including Kent Tankred and Carl Michael von Hausswolff; plus the UK Touch label boss Mike Harding and two of his stars, BJ Nilsen and Jacob Kirkegaard; and, perhaps rather surprisingly, J G Thirlwell, who in the 1980s was an incendiary 'noise and beats' rock artiste under name of Foetus. Everyone involved – it took 14 people to do it! – met up at a music festival in Oslo in 2004, under the direction of Carl Michael. Far from being the 'freak-out' implied in the title, it's incredibly boring, a monotonous set of tones all resonating on the same fairly inoffensive frequency throughout, and seems to be evidence of one of the most maddening examples ever of collective 'politeness' in a collective musical event. You know, the sort of occasion where no-one involved will dare to take the slightest risk, for fear of offending one of the other participants. Well, that's fine and dandy for a party full of Chardonnay, olives and polite chatter, but for an art statement? Pooh-pah! Given that many of those involved (especially Mr Thirlwell) have a history of dissenting from common values such as good sense, good taste, politeness and restraint, the vapid results on this disc are all the more surprising. This mediocre blather is so bland, bourgeois and inoffensive you could put it on BBC One any given evening, and no-one would bat an eyelid.



ED PINSENT 16/07/2006

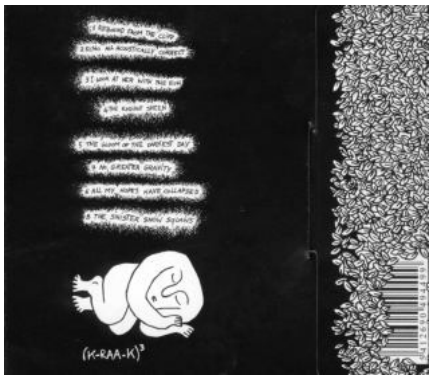
www.freq-out.org
www.ashinternational.com

Ignatz

Ignatz
BELGIUM (K-RAA-K)^3 K049 CD (2005)

Ignatz is Bram Devens, a Brussels-based musician and certainly one of the least distinguished of the many artists in recent years who have dropped folkish acoustic guitar moves into a stew of electronic effects. Lacking the luminosity and sense of space characteristic of Four Tet, Boards of Canada and other leading lights of what has cringingly been termed folktronica, Ignatz depends on scratchy lo-fi methods in a game but ultimately doomed bid for grit and authenticity.

On this, his first album, Ignatz reaches back to Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* in an attempt to tap into that vital wellspring of unmediated expression. His artless



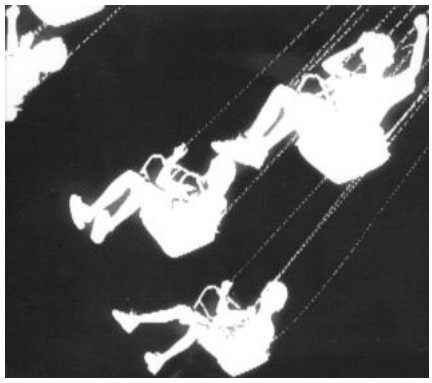
vocals approximate to the nasal twang of many of the singers on the Smith box set, but trade their raw immediacy for a postmodern synthesis of acoustic and electronic forms. The results, almost without exception, are lame and unremarkable. The lengthy opener, 'Rebound From The Cliff', meanders on a path of fuzzed out guitar and peak level distortion without gathering much in the way of drama or conviction. Here and throughout, Devens approaches his vocals as interjections rather than as organic elements of the song, and they end up sounding sketchy and tacked-on as a result.

The title of 'The Radiant Sheen' can only be ironic, since there is precious little radiance coming from the song in question. Instead, Devens lays down a bloopy rhythm track and overlays it with bloodless vocals and primitive, Velvets-y guitar. Elsewhere, 'No Greater Gravity' begins pleasantly enough in its merging of acoustic simplicity and angular feedback, before losing its way with egregious processed humming sounds. The curiously titled 'I Look At Her With The Euh' (sic) reveals Devens' improvisational methods to be somewhat slack. Listening to his guitar work, one never gets the impression that he is driven to create this music; channelled, inspirational playing is not much in evidence here.

The closing and longest track, 'The Sinister Snow Squaws', is the one occasion on which Ignatz's unstructured approach pays off. Combining just guitar and processing, the piece eschews vocals and beats and has something of the flavour of late period Swans in its slowly turning expansiveness. Devens adopts Jandek's atonal, clanky style while bathing his guitar in a warm fog of effects. One wishes that Ignatz had adopted a similarly impressionistic approach elsewhere on the record.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.kraak.net



Takagi Masakatsu

Journal For People
USA CARPARK RECORDS CAK32 CD + DVD (2006)

A rare beast this from a rarer bird. Masakatsu-san from Kyoto seems to divide his time equally between musician and video artist, including amongst the growing roster of fans of his visual shenanigans the likes of Ryoji Ikeda and David Sylvian. This combined CD and DVD package, originally released in a Japan-only edition in 2002 on Japanese label Daisyworld, now gets a re-release on American label Carpark, Masakatsu having thoughtfully produced video work to accompany his own music.

By all accounts a classically trained pianist and electronics whiz kid he mixes a bit of both into the music on the CD. It's a little surprising then that all the tunes are, without exception, pleasant enough ditties in a (very) ambient pop style that won't trouble the grey matter too much. I imagine it's music to watch the modern world by, or at least a world free from hunger, strife and other such mild annoyances as a good part of it has to put up with. The DVD contains quite uncannily exact visual equivalents to the aural landscapes on the CD. It's all washy imagery with digital colour effects, none of it really adding up to very much more than exactly what you see on screen.

When all is said and done it's wallpaper music, and if I want wallpaper music then give me at least Satie any day (indeed much of Masakatsu's

piano tinkling is of a sub-Satie-esque style). I dare anybody to be challenged in any possible way by the material on either the CD or the DVD, which are fairly interchangeable anyway. If you were of a more romantic mindset than myself I guess you would say that it was comforting, in some vaguely perverse way, and all music has to have some purpose, right? You have to hand it to the man though, he sure knows his style, and Masakatsu does Masakatsu very well, obviously able to churn stuff out like this endlessly without batting so much as an eyelid.

AARON ROBERTSON

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www.carparkrecords.com

Apt. J(ext.)ie / Irrchie

Night Wearing Feathers
USA PSYCHFORM RECORDS
PFcdR3-03 CDR (2006)

Quite good 'nocturne' piece in 20 minutes by this unlikely-sounding team-up; it's vaguely weirded-out keyboard or synth drone with additional rounds of honking electric hoots and rattling sound effects. It has a very vivid and crisp sound, and given the graveyard hints of the cover photo and the night-time setting for this piece, I'm trying hard to hear the vengeful bones of dead men emerging from their graves in those rattling effects. However, despite the aura of sub-surrealism it aspires to, this miniature is ultimately inconsequential. Irr. App. (ext.) is Matt Waldron; as to At Jennie Richie, it's just surprising to find a title element from a Henry Darger painting being used in an electronica context. On Stan Reed's label, in a tasty package of black card with silver lettering and a photo hand-mounted on cover, and sealed with wax.

ED PINSENT 14/10/2006

psychform@hotmail.com
www.psychform.com

Ectogram

Electric Deckchair
UK ANKSTMUSIK ANKST 115 2 x CD (2005)

Coming on like some alternative early Velvets, with a touch of the Youth thrown in for good measure, this bunch of Welsh groovesters ooze a trail of semi-psychedelic fairy dust wherever they travel aurally, which they obviously do on another astral plane than the rest of us. Proving that there really is something in the Welsh water as we've long suspected, these dopesters come from the same multi-coloured stable as Super Furry Animals and Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, both since having obviously found fame and fortune elsewhere. They're also not surprisingly huge fans of Faust, with whom they've apparently played in Germany and in the UK.

This is a huge, sprawling double CD, with each being billed as a separate album in its own right, and indeed the two CDs are respectively sub-titled, 'Sing Something Sibilant', and 'Sing Something Complex', not that there's any real difference to be had between them. There's a good deal of meandering to be heard, such is the nature of the beastie, but one can't help but feeling they might have been better off reining in their sense of abused freedom for an instant and being content with having just a single piece of plastic to their name. Ann Mathews' voice does seem surprisingly at odds with the heady musical brew, but in a nice way. Maybe I was just expecting Nico or Kim, I'm not sure. Somehow it all seems to add up.

Interestingly, much of the music press they seem to get doesn't know what to make of them, preferring to paint them as complete oddballs beyond the musical pale. Of course, at this quality establishment we can obviously be trusted to give them a more sympathetic hearing. In apparent contradiction to what I've just said about limiting themselves to one album, I will say that they don't really seem to go all the way with their psychedelic posturing, instead strangely preferring to divide their output between shortish numbers of a pop length, and more familiar freak-outs that pass the twenty-minute mark. Which for me seems a bit of a shame. I know I felt suitably drugged-up by the end of this lot, but if it had of been one continuous stream of consciousness sound I could have perhaps joined them on that other level.

AARON ROBERTSON

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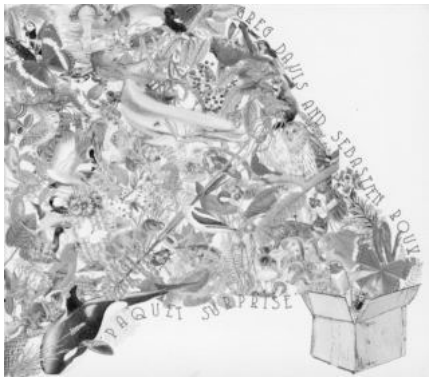
DJ Olive

Sleep
AUSTRALIA ROOM 40 RM413 CD (2006)

A collection of Olive's 'experiments in ambient sound spaces' and marking his status as a pioneer of sleep-parties in Brooklyn during the early 1990s. This is 48 minutes of sickeningly 'tasteful' electronic pap that'll make you feel like you've eaten two buckets of candyfloss in one sitting. Granted, it gets off to a promising Oval-esque start, but quickly slides into the slime of wimpy, ambient swill, spooling off equivocal half-assed statements with absolutely no structure or backbone. I'd have hoped that a man who once took up arms with Text Of Light would be grittier than this. Bleah! Fully matches its title; sounds like he fell asleep behind the decks. You will too. But if intended for a sleep-party (whatever that may be), I expect that's the point of it.

ED PINSENT 23/08/2006

www.room40.org



Greg Davis and Sebastien Roux

Paquet Surprise
USA CARPARK RECORDS CRPK 030 CD (2005)

Frenchman Sebastien Roux and American Greg Davis move past the barriers of international politics to produce this album of gently unfolding moments. Davis seems to have a penchant for both Cage and environmental recordings and, as the press release states, 'has toured the world extensively' with the likes of Keith Fullerton Whitman. Meanwhile, poor Roux is left to slave away deep in the bowels of the concrete bunker that is IRCAM in Paris. The CD is the result of a lengthy Internet exchange of ideas that led them to finally put their money where their emails were.

For the surprise package that it is meant to be it isn't really all that surprising. Our able duo seems to prefer dealing more in luscious washes of sound rather than anything that will knock your pants off. The music that the pair makes is an interesting attempt at finding a middle ground between elements like the above mentioned environmental recordings, musique concrète, sound synthesis, and more recognizably pop and folk elements. A welcome alternative, especially to the sterile nonsense that often seems to worm its way out of IRCAM. Good god, some of these even have 'lyrics'!

Davis particularly seems to throw in everything but the kitchen sink to make his brand of soft noise, whilst Roux, having a Jesuit heritage, proves somewhat more restrained. It all adds up to an album that is guilty perhaps only of being labelled under 'easy-listening experimental' or some such silly thing. Maybe this is just because there is far more to hang on to in this CD than in most of its contemporaries, and I certainly won't be the first to suggest that such a thing is a crime. It won't push your boundaries as much as draw you in to its warm, safe-place of sound, wrapping your ears with its loving glow.

AARON ROBERTSON

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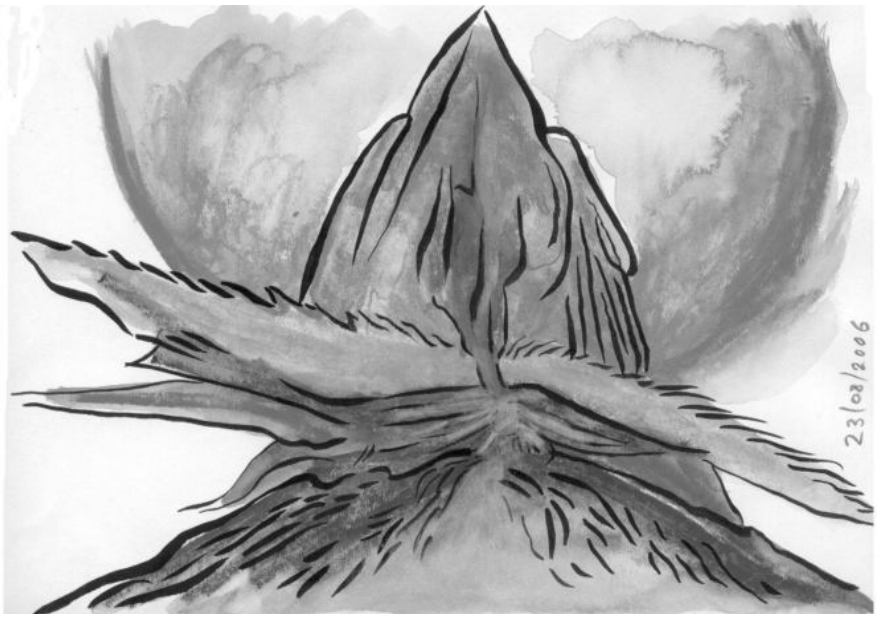
THE DRONING ONES



Ben Reynolds

Outmospheric Arts of the Outmosphere

USA DIGITALIS INDUSTRIES DIGI028 CD (2006)

This creative loner genius Scots player has recently performed as a member of Ashtray Navigations and made several solo CDR releases of his solo drones. Here he is with a totally lovely and creamy solo disc, showing his delicacy of touch in these multiple-overdub works and an overall subtlety that is remarkable…each track is as light as a soap bubble, positively floating free as it hangs suspended in space and revolves in slow motion. Although at first hearing this disc may appear like just another series of simple drones, in fact every cut is packed with all sorts of detail and events. Complex instrumental arrangements, producing micro-melodies and counter-rhythms, while background wallpaper patterns constantly mutate simultaneously. Each work is an ingenious three-dimensional tower-block of overlapping shapes that drift around in front of and behind each other to generate new shapes. Totally mesmerising! My favourites include 'Cracks Swoon Moon' for its euphoria, and 'Sweet Misty' for its glorpy treated nasal voice whines. But then the title track is pretty magnificent and so is 'Classic at the Sound World', a piece that seems to make Bowie's scenario in 'Drive-In Saturday' come true. Produced using electronic keyboards, guitars, and effects; no single element dominates to overturn the exquisite balance. This disc refreshes the aural palette, yet it's not some lightweight electronica meringue, indeed Reynolds brings a certain darkness of tone which adds gravity to his mysterious, alchemical enterprises. Can't praise this release too highly. Weird cover is an arresting mix of high seriousness with low comedy, showing an avant-garde grid of light in the style of Ryoji Ikeda, superimposed with a grinning, slightly menacing visage, perhaps that of Reynolds himself as he cavorts like an enthused daemon through his self-made zones of exile. A minimal-mystical masterpiece!

ED PINSENT 26/07/2006

www.digitalisindustries.com

Jazzfinger

Autumn Engines

USA REBIS 009 CD (2006)

Jazzfinger were interviewed with aplomb by John Bagnall last ish, where it was revealed that this English underground duo of Hasan Gaylani and Ben Jones are sitting on a mountain of unreleased tapes, the fruit of their many abundant sessions since their formation in 1996…this CD is but one of many Jazzfinger releases this season (another one is *Los Band Magicos* on Low Point), in what must be a concerted international effort to address that burning issue and reduce the volume of said tape mountain. We only have this one to hand, but what a gem it be. The title *Autumn Engines* isn't that far from something Ray Bradbury would have scribed, and I feel certain he would approve of any one of these 11 cuts being used as soundtrack music for a televised version of one of his numerous October-themed fantasy stories. Gaylani and Jones, here assisted by regular member Ben Wilkinson and also by Sarah Sullivan, often find their name uttered in the same breath as Vibracathedral and Ashtray, but it's time we acknowledged their distinct musical identity, and the value of same. They create creaky, cranky, lo-fi mystery assemblages in bricolage fashion, using found tapes, scrapey percussion, and very modest instrumentation such as melodica and battery-operated keyboards. There is also some raucous, primitive guitar-mangling noise, documented on 'Room'. Slow-moving, grainy, poetic abstractions seep out from their dusty practice amps, and are assigned cut-up titles after the fact. 'Fishing in wet railways' is but one example of their lyrical craft in that regard. An abundance of textures in their rich overall sound, and amazing 'distorto' effects that keep your sense of intrigue alive; these ultimately combine to pass on a strange nostalgia, and even a very English identity (one of damp leaves, railway trains and tobacco smoke) is evoked successfully. The only complaint we have is that everything here is quite shapeless and oddly unmemorable, so that you have no clear impression of it after it's finished; but while you're actually there, it's a soft-focus wonderland of dreamy delight. This effect is made all the more poignant by the sudden cut-off edit that concludes each track so rudely. It also suggests we're hearing some very heavily-edited highlights, extracts from far-longer experiments and explorations. Pleased to see this on the REBIS label, along with a newie by Italian droners MCIAA, and of course the 2 CD compilation of 'long-form' players; perhaps this will bring Jazzfinger closer to the audience they deserve.

ED PINSENT 08/10/2006

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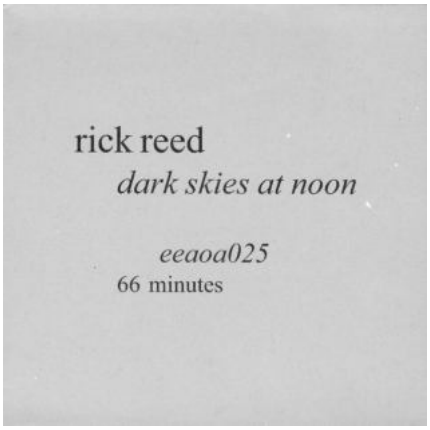
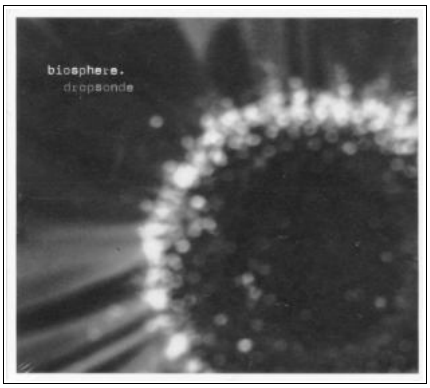


Rick Reed
Dark Skies at Noon
USA ELEVATOR BATH eeaoa025 CD (2005)

A sublime collection of richly complex, exciting, minimal droning and tape-work from this great American musician who's based in Texas. He has connections with AMM, as evidenced by the presence of Keith Rowe who contributes his trademark guitar and radio work to one track. The names of Reed and his wife have also been incorporated in the title of an AMM CD which was released by ReR Megacorp in 1997, so the connection goes some way back. Some (not me) have observed with interest the way that this deeply American composer seems to have emulated, with some accuracy, a mode of improvisatory droning that is claimed to be the preserve of Europeans. I can't comment on that, but beyond the surface similarities of this music with certain recent Erstwhile releases, very recent Rowe work and (up to a point) certain passages of AMM work, Reed is carving out a strongly personal and unique identity of his own. It's also interesting that he has connections with Ken Jacobs, a veteran underground film-maker, more American than whom you can't get; every frame of his work has 'made in USA' stamped in the grain. One track on Reed's CD is dedicated to Jacobs and indeed was used by the film-maker as part of a multi-media presentation. Reed himself plays the Moog, short-wave radio, field recordings, and sinewave generators; a familiar enough set-up perhaps, but the real intensity has come from the strength of the performances and the assemblage / editing which takes place in his home studio. We have results that are very studied, with evidence of slow and careful mixage, with subtle combinations and balance of elements; and works that achieve real transcendence in their meditational scope. Very rich with their use of changes, textures, events, filters, and planned overall shape. 'Ceremony' was recorded live in Texas, the remaining works put together in Reed's studio. From 2002-04, this is a strong collection of beautiful music.

ED PINSENT 22/11/2006

www.elevatorbath.com



Biosphere
Dropsonde
UK TOUCH TO:66 CD CD (2006)

I quite liked Biosphere's 2004 Touch release, *Autour de la Lune*. It had an episodic quality to it that seemed to aim at telling some sort of story in sound, which of course it was. This album, however, is a completely different kettle of fish. Neither a story in sound, nor a soundtrack-type work such as *Substrata*, probably his best known release, this CD sees Gier Jenssen apparently travelling in new directions toward the cool jazz colours popularised by people like Miles Davis a good fifty years ago.

I had to laugh at that, especially when it turns out that this idea seems to be flimsily based on a couple of tracks on the album that feature some rather uninspired jazz drumming as part of their overall sound. What Miles would have thought of such nonsense I can well imagine. I must admit there is something rather hypnotic about the tracks, but the implied mixture of pleasure and dread contained in their sound was unfortunately lost on me. I was indeed encouraged to drift away, not into a haze of

images and scenes as Touch would have us imagine, but instead into a deep sleep. Then I had to drag myself back to write this review.

There is much comment bandied about on the sheer emotional depth involved in Biosphere's work, although I can only assume that such comment emanates from the sort of people whose own lives are emotionally rather shallow. If I had a nicer apartment I might be tempted to put it on in the background, just to give things an overall sonic 'sheen' to them, such is the conceptual nature of the album. This CD is marked as something of a return to form for Jensen, although sadly I preferred him when he was actually going places.

AARON ROBERTSON

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Freiband
All In A Day's Work
USA PINEAPPLE TAPES 007 CASS (2006)

Here's Nijmegen's finest export, Frans de Waard, that all-round good guy and Dutch legend of underground electronica, and a man of many aliases and projects. Here he's working under his Freiband alias, which he's been doing since about 2001. This particular line of musical enquiry is based on the idea of scratching CDs and exploiting the resulting digital glitch in playback, much the same way as Oval or Bruce Gilbert, but with totally different results. In 2006 he joined the American duo Idea Fire Company on their European tour for some dates; and this release, on the IFCO label Swill Radio, contains two long tracks, to be 'seen as a remix of live

recordings of IFCO'. It's a baffling way for him to describe these two monotonous drones, 'Faster But Slower' and 'A Solo Duo'. They don't progress at all! They may be derived from a fragment of a live IFCO recording made into a loop, or a CD of same treated by Freiband method of scratching disc surface, as above. All we get on the A side is one low sound and one high sound, held for a very long time, almost amounting to a simple musical chord, but mostly remaining a jarring and faintly alarming noise. Listen for long enough and it could, I suppose, either drive you totally nuts or send you into a blissful state of oblivion. The B side is more sinister still, puffing out a threatening billow of aural cloudiness from its musical lungs. *All In A Day's Work* is a tape of quite chilling minimal electronic concept music, building on a simple idea and spinning it into the stratosphere.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2006

www.anti-naturals.org/swill

Ashtray Navigations
The Love that Whirrs
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 087 CD

(2005)

Another great release from Phil Todd and collaborators, recorded 2004-05, and filled with compellingly beautiful vortexes of luscious music that will slowly pull you into their centre of gravity. Todd's electric guitar here is documented in several different modes of deployment: as a tool for solid droning, as a lead instrument adding silver-plated guitar melody lines, and as a noisy scrape device to roughen up the surface or lay down some gritty textures. The other layers of noise, sound and music are clear and separated out in the mixes, unlike his familiar morasses of sound in earlier works. Clattering percussion, hooting clarinets, even the fine detail of amplifier hum are all discernible and ring out as clear as a bell. Alexander Neilson, Ben Reynolds and Melanie Delaney are all credited as navigators in the Ashtray's current incarnation, and they add a lot of sheer joyful noise and playful racket to bolster up the usual sun-drenched trancey drones.

Everything hereon is great music, although one track 'She's like black glass on a pinball table, threatening the love that whirrs' deserves singling out for its reduced playing, its minimal input yielding maximum results. We hear something like rattling glass jars in a sandstorm right next to a power-generator and a constant sine wave drone. Full of understated power, yet also laced with potent passages of 'pure' noise, as close to noise as Todd has ever allowed this project to get. 'Play real damn loud' is his exhortation on the cover, but on the other hand loads of CDs say something similar these days. Also interesting that Todd continues to resist any form of conventional production for his finished products (despite what I say about the 'clarity' of sound, which I take as a sign of Ashtray's overall professionalism). He doggedly continues to find beauty on his own terms, within his own slightly ramshackle home-made world.

ED PINSENT 11/07/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

Peter Wright

Red Lion

USA DIGITALIS INDUSTRIES DIGI027 CD (2006)

Long droning scapes created largely on the electric guitar by New Zealander Wright, the overall work sometimes tempered and combined with field recordings – a not-unfamiliar practice. Various London performances from 2004 (one of them was in the Tate Modern) are merged via editing into one continuous experience, passing on a lengthy morphing episode for your listening pleasure. His best moments come when his processing effects and foot pedals (which he uses a lot) go into overdrive, he makes too many extraneous noises, and the whole elaborate construct nearly veers out of control like a balsa wood model slowly toppling over. For the most part though, his music is very subdued, slow, and tasteful, with plenty of evidence that the man behind the instrument is controlling every waking second of what he does. Card sleeve; cover depicts red and orange psychedelic flowers floating in the air above a London skyline. Such visions are the lot of Peter Wright, or anyone who fully surrenders to the *Red Lion* droning experience.

ED PINSENT 08/07/2006

www.digitalisindustries.com

Peter Wright

Pariahs Sing Om

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 89-91 3 x CD (2005)

I've only skimmed the surface of this triple-CD compilation, but it seems listenable enough; droney and slow-moving solo overdubbed material, made with lots of electric guitars and help from some processing units, FX, and a computer. Recorded mostly in period 2000-2003 by this evidently quite prolific New Zealand fellow. He calls them 'drone-poems'; and they do possess, at best, certain lyrical and associative qualities, working along the lines of short, free-form poetry rather than the lines of narrative-driven, significant and symbol-laden prose work. Listeners may find themselves reflecting on certain vague emotional states – sorrow, mortality, elation, or a slowly-dawning enlightenment - as they immerse themselves in these stately and spacey recordings. Yet Wright himself offers no clues as to his own authorial intentions, other than what he provides in the brief yet evocative titles; the remainder of available space in the package is devoted a long descriptive list of his equipment and recording methods. Everything I've heard so far has been quite pleasant and free from any musical stumbling blocks such as melody, structure, or rhythm; the only musical consistency is that many of the works seem to remain (more or less) in one key. Recommended if you like that elusive 'floating' quality in your sounds, but not recommended to fans of Minimalism; Wright's work, although slow, is actually quite detailed and eventful and verging on the 'maximal'. Most pieces have been previously issued, some on CDRs in small editions, for example by Celebrate Psi Phenomenon, kRkRkRk, and Apoplexy.

ED PINSENT 26/11/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

Area C

Traffics + Discoveries

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 098 CD (2006)

American Eric Carlson from Providence RI is filled with awe at the mysteries of life, particularly inspired by his travels in the Orient, from which he brought back photographs of Taiwan and recordings of temple music from Taipei. He transforms his otherwise ordinary acoustic and electric guitar-playing by making loops and using effects and samples; and he roughens up the edges with a little light electronica glitch business, occasionally adding an unobtrusive organ note. This disc has little flashes of profundity, but it's mostly too tasteful and 'nice' for me. The green cover depicts the side of a building in China. The inside shows a pond full of fish. In proposing that we contemplate the beauty of these simple things, he exhibits good Zen-like intentions which don't actually translate into successful musical statements.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2006

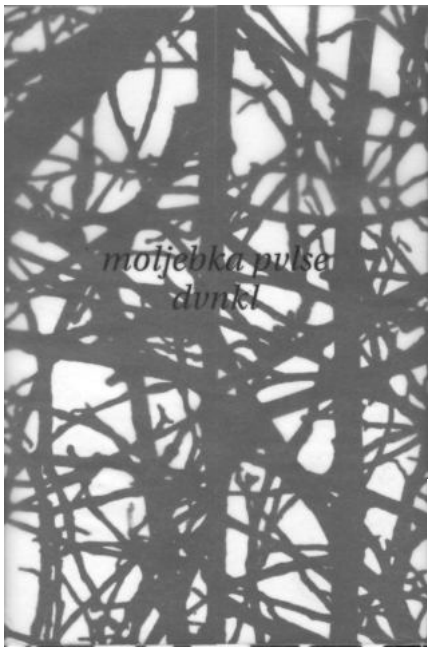
www.lastvisibledog.com

Alvars Orkester

Interference

UK ASH INTERNATIONAL # ASH 6.9 CD (2006)

Excellent release of 'art' electronic music, four strong pieces in 40 minutes, probably by Joachim Nordwall and Jan Svensson in Sweden in 2005. Their tagline is 'Analogue sound experiments from Old Sweden', a somewhat mysterious claim which stirs my thirst for intrigue as it alludes to the dark pagan history of that Nordic land. Indeed, the pair would easily fit my warped vision; I see them as pre-Enlightenment scientists practising forgotten arts. Each long-form droning



work here seems almost solid, starting as a gas and then mutating rapidly into a hard metal that collides with solid bodies as it swings through the air. There's an other-worldly, metaphysical edge in the transformations and transgressions they engender. 'Cobra Mist' has an abundance of rough edges, a tactile nugget of noise dug straight from the forbidden Swedish tin mines, and loaded with layers of hidden noise to help strengthen the potent concoction. 'Reality Dimension Field' uses a tape-collage of voices, perhaps plucked from US TV shows or banal Hollywood movies, to piece together a disturbing anti-narrative, a twisted soap opera, in half-heard fragments of speech. 'Johannishus' annexes a small part of Carl Michael von Hausswolff's territory, and is about as menacing as anything oozed out by the master himself from his pores of Swedish mysticism. And 'Field Grey' is just a sumptuous array of dazzling atmospheric effects that make you feel like you're going blind – yet what amazing sights you now behold in this new world of darkness, and you are grateful to your tormentors for wielding the red-hot poker that cancelled your sight. An intelligent and abstemious collection, secretly packing about 2,500 volts of understated power.

ED PINSENT 22/07/2006

www.ashinternational.com
www.alvarsorkester.org

See also a tape by the Orkester in the Lamenting Octopus section. Joachim Nordwall is also in The Skull Defekts.

Moljebka pvlse

dvnkl

SWEDEN FIFTH WEEK FW003 CD (2006)

Moljebka pvlse is usually a solo project by Mathias Josefson, but this time a duo; Josefson is joined by singer and drummer Karin Jakobson from Les Issambres. Together, they use field recordings, electronics and computer processing (and who doesn't, these days?) to create three monotonous industrial-ish tracks. Not much going on in these stern, grey abstractions to liven up your solemn mood, but it is at least some improvement on the previous heavy-handed, introverted gloom-parade by Moljebka pvlse on the Segerhuva label. The title track is the most successful one for me, as its layers of 'airy' sounds and disembodied voices (presumably contributed by Ms Jakobson) start to stack up and reach some sort of state of agitation. But for all the 'theatrical precision' in its execution, for the most part this CD veers too easily into over-familiar 'dark ambient' territory. Very nice package with an elaborate tracing paper fold-over wallet, with a stripped-down image of bare branches in a wintry sky. Their seventh album!

ED PINSENT 15/10/2006

www.fifthweek.se
www.moljebka.com

Lanterns

Wax Cavern

UK SCREECHING SNOWFLAKE 03 CDR

Local droners from Leeds and Glasgow make good with this hour-long home-made CDR, including two lengthy continuous performances, perhaps recorded live. It's built up from a lot of melodic chordal strums in key of G or C or whatever, laid low against lots of low-level inoffensive scrapey noise, with all the music taken at a very walker-friendly pace like a stroll alongside the canal. Very strong atmosphere. One gets immediate impression of a collective of young enthusiasts armed with guitars, keyboards, percussion, loud amplification and several large carrier bags packed with nifty FX pedals. Listen to these phased guitars, groaning voices, and the tons of echoed droney murk in which everything floats, which they generate as easy as turning on a lava-lamp. Second impression, a highly subjective one, is that everything was recorded by candlelight. That's the power of suggestion in their name, but this nocturne theory holds good as you sink deeper into this vaguely dark music. A general sense of 'going for the cosmic' space-jam vibe oozes from the team of players, with the requisite Minimalism and Noise influences thrown into the pot too. So of course anyone with a critical eye whips out the score-card and before long the Vibracathedral box is ticked, and soon after the Ashtray Navigations box has 5 points entered in it, and one feels one is well on the way to getting measure of the Lanterns. Actually Lanterns are slightly darker than either of those

sunlit worshippers of Sol, and I was prepared to credit them with some sense of dynamics, but truth is there is little development in the music as a whole despite textural variances in the sound one moment to the next. In fact it's all living in 'the moment', and everything they do when tripping out in said mode lacks shape overall – all they can do is create a big floppy psychedelic tent for you to squirm around in as if cavorting at some mud-strewn festival. I was going to say they'd inflated a bouncy castle but nothing so vivacious can be said to emanate from the tongues of these languid snails. It's very enjoyable however and a ceremonial listen to this CD merits getting out of your gourd on alcohol / weed of your choosing and plastering your bod against the orange sofa. Two tracks are called 'Loverangle' and 'Space Chutney'. CDR in a sleeve hand-painted with colourful blobs, Music likewise adds up to a fest of drone-some noisy blobs of abstract colour.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2006

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www.lanternsmusic.co.uk

The Moglass

Sparrow Juice

UKRAINE NEXSOUND ns45 CD (2006)

Cover art is a miniature gem, with its collage of illuminated manuscripts pasted alongside children's' drawings, to create a fanciful frieze of animals, birds and nature. This image suggests all kinds of interesting possibilities – different ways of seeing the world, the 'ancientness' of early manuscripts contrasted with the newness of youth, the animal kingdom prevailing over mankind. Try as I may though, I can't find any such depths in the music here. It's pleasing, but inessential, and I'm disappointed because this Ukrainian combo have exhibited a lot more wiriness and grit in their past work. Few of these desirable qualities are evident on this release. Now I think about it, their strength has been in creating moods and atmospheres rather than composing strong melodies or weaving memorable instrumental themes. And you can't get much more atmospheric than this wispy CD! Amongst the ethereal clouds, it does have certain lyrical details, for example in the placement of recordings of children's' voices or music-box samples somewhere within deep, rippling and cold electronic abstractions. These juxtapositions aren't just 'clever', and they do stir certain nostalgic memories. But we're also weighed down with many overlong stretches of aimless instrumental noodling, as one member of the band plucks endlessly on a stringed

instrument or pokes uncertainly at the keys of a celeste. This can get irritating. Each cut is preceded by a brief field recording segment, perhaps acting as an informal heading or title to each work. Other than that, I don't have enough data to latch onto, and can't find enough meaning in the drifty work.

ED PINSENT 09/10/2006

www.nexsound.org

Silvester Anfang

Satanische vrede

BELGIUM (K-RAA-K)[3] K050 VINYL LP (2006)

Promising signs of 'Satanic evil' emanate from the front cover, where the band all wear crude home-made KKK masks, pose with torsos bared in the woods, and proudly exhibit a horned goat as their familiar…said *ovis capra* makes a reappearance on the insert, along with a pentagram. Plus there are track titles like 'Verkracht Door Demon' and 'Demonische Agricultuur II'. How diabolical can you get? However, the music of Silvester Anfang turns out to be routine folk-drone, scrape and percussion stuff, mostly klunky and heavy-handed in execution, occasionally getting slightly more Krautrocky as the band picks up momentum. A five-piece, they use acoustic and electric guitars, flutes, tambourines and percussion on these five solemn cuts, their sound remaining sludgy and sluggish over two dreary sides of vinyl. The only bit I really like is the samples of crow caws on side one. These Belgians have their own imprint Funeral Folk where, who knows, they may fare better; a title like *We Creep Within Dark Places* sounds promising. This 'psych-collective' may have a slightly pagan and ceremonial vibe, but next to any average blast of Black Metal they pretty much wither away.

ED PINSENT 21/10/2006

www.kraak.net

Additional Dreamy Droners

If, Bwana has one CD on his own Pogus label this season (see elsewhere), and *Gruntle* (ABSURD #48) which arrives in that label's trademark circular card sleeve. Four solo tracks of excellent sawing, droning and electronic noises produced using synths, moogs, tape, e-bow and violin overdubs. Al Margolis does some great collaborative work, but if you like it obsessive and monotonous then it's his solo works like this you need to check out. '20 Violins V2' from 2001is particularly diabolical; he's wonderful with multiple overdubs which seem so powerful as to mutate reality. (EP)

Alphane Moon disappoints with his new CDR *Made of Flowers Full of Stars* (OGGUM 15CDR); this is the 'ambient' side project of Our Glassie Azoth, Sound Projector favourites, here wasting our time with airy electronic wittering that has no root chord or tonal centre that might lend it shape or direction. Very unengaging. (EP)

Three strange pieces of droning and scraping electronic music arrived mysteriously from **Nos Phillipé**, who is probably a UK solo act; what he sent was simply a CDR demo in a nice package, but there's something intriguing going on in these slightly obsessive foggy layerings of his. With some more focused ideas, he might get somewhere. Email nosphilipe@hotmail.com. (EP)

Rosy Parlane's *Jessamine* (TOUCH TO:68) is a collection of three tracks recorded in New Zealand. Parlane himself plays an enormous number of instruments, it took him two years to record this material, and no fewer than ten guitarists (including such greats as Oren Ambarchi, Tetuzi Akiyama, Lasse M, and Stefan Neville) contributed their services to the finished works. Yet for all this effort and accumulated man-hours, all we have to show for it is 49 minutes of tedious, tasteful, monochromatic drone music. (EP)

Songs and their Singers

Damon and Naomi

The Earth is Blue

USA 20 | 20 | 20 202020.01 CD (2005)

Much as I love Damon and Naomi, pinning down their songs can be a frustrating experience. Some seem to amount to little more than a series of details - very pretty details admittedly – but in the context of an album it can be hard to tell one song from another. This isn't limited to Damon and Naomi's self-penned material. Even their cover of 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' strips the song of most of its melody.

But it seems they're canny enough to appreciate their own limitations and, like Yo La Tengo, another band who are inclined to musical politeness, they've made a habit of recruiting musical muscle to beef up their tunes, working with people from the avant garde / free jazz worlds, folks who are more comfortable laying themselves on the line and making direct, definite statements in sound.

Producer and musician Mark Kramer performed this role on their early recordings but over the last few years Ghost guitarist Michio Kurihara has been their main collaborator. And he's much needed because Damon and Naomi are essentially functional musicians - Damon can strum the chords of the song in time, and Naomi plays workmanlike bass fills, very similar to the ones she was coming out with when the duo were part of Galaxy 500. But there's nothing in their delivery to hook the ear. Unadorned, their songs are fairly conventional cocktail jazz tunes, but Kurihara's unfussy, languorous, and expansive guitar work frees them from the intimate setting of the jazz club and relocates them in vast pastoral landscapes.

His playing was the making of the lovely live CD, *Song to the Siren*, and having secured almost-equal billing on that record (his name was on the cover but Damon and Naomi's were in bold), Kurihara is relegated from main billing on this release, although his contribution seems just as fundamental as before. He especially shines in the lengthy coda where his guitar lines streak off into the distance like wisps of mist. But elsewhere he's frustrating low in the mix and D&N's indecisiveness in the studio seems to have rubbed off on him, his playing sounding rather aimless through much of the record. The effect is like a significant reduction of scale, a narrowing of focus; small disturbances on the surface of a secluded forest pond.

So it's left to several guest musicians (Grey Kelley on trumpet, Bhob Rainey on soprano sax and Dana Kletter on piano) to tease out any structure or dynamics implicit in the songs. This works most spectacularly on 'Beautiful Close Double' and 'The Earth is Blue', which open and close the album respectively. These tracks build palaces out of thin air, and are worth the asking price on their own.

The Earth is blue… are Damon and Naomi too? Some disbelievers reckon their music to be uniformly miserable. I don't hear it myself. Damon and Naomi clearly aren't moaners and they don't spend their songs complaining about how badly life has been treating them. In fact they come across as fairly cheery, upbeat people when interviewed. But on the face of it they do seem to be fascinated with the romantic aspects of sadness – unrequited love, absent friends, that sort of thing. Perhaps they see a certain beauty in such feelings. If so, on a good day they practically bottle it in musical form – sip from their cool clear mineral water as the mood takes you. If you're not convinced, there's further evidence on the cover of their first LP, *More Sad Hits* - a Man Ray photo of a crying woman, with pearls where tears should be.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

www.20-20-20.com

Fariña

Allotments

UK PICKLED EGG EGG58 CD (2006)

As the long winter nights draw in, music lovers need something happy and generous to ward off the onset of the cold and the dark. Look no further than Fariña's *Allotments*, a record filled to the brim with smart, vivacious songwriting,

and one that issues a timely reminder of the virtues of literate, well crafted pop music.

Remarkably, the core members of Fariña, Mark Brend and Matt Gale, have been making music together for 25 years. They are joined on *Allotments* by Cliff Glanfield and Tim Conway, forming a group whose collective intuition and co-operative spirit are in ample evidence throughout this record's twelve tracks. Free of grandstanding displays of egotism, the four band members each write some of the songs, share lead vocals and create a tone of charming togetherness.

Fariña have drawn comparisons with folk troubadours such as David Ackles and Tim Hardin, but for my money their most obvious antecedent is the refined pop of bands like the Lilac Time and the Go-Betweens. The opening 'Island of Hotels' is simply a perfect song, its wistful pastoralism defined by Brend's airy vocals and Conway's blissed out acoustic guitar work. A gentle trumpet solo wanders in and out of the languid rhythm section, sealing the song's timeless, summery beauty.

As the record progresses, it is Brend (the author of three books on music) who comes across as the most gifted of the group's writers. 'Island of Hotels' is one of his, and so too are most of the album's highlights, from the witty, Lloyd Cole-esque 'Never Any Good' to the moving elegy for lost love and opportunity, 'B-Side': 'I may be tough, but sometimes rock'n'roll is not enough/Is this what you get/You get a black belt in regret.' The song is beautifully framed by shimmering electric guitar and an extended instrumental outro.

Things do get a little arch at times. Gale's 'Brief Encounter' is a slight, sub-Divine Comedy sketch of a woman's illicit encounter with her lover, and the Neil Hannon similarities continue into Brend's wordy paean to corporate salesmen, 'Sales Force', and Conway's similarly prolix 'Sleep'. Musically, Fariña have a weakness for cheap Casio synthesisers that lessens the emotional impact of a song like 'She Radiates'. Despite these reservations, Allotments is still a tender, quietly impressive collection.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.pickled-egg.co.uk

Marston
Redtail
USA BOX TREE RECORDS BT1000 CD (2005)

Jodie Jean Marston's *Redtail* is a near-perfect collection of contemporary American folk songs. Its ten tracks effortlessly evoke a mood of quiet, parched landscape with great precision and economy, combining the hypnotic stillness of Will Oldham (whose brother Ned plays guitar and bass here) with the cosmic stylings of Gram Parsons and The Band. Reserved and unhurried in execution, it nonetheless leaves a lasting impression of measured, strong-willed intentness.

Marston's singing voice has more than a touch of the honeyed drawl of Lucinda Williams, but her songs inhabit a different universe entirely. Trading Williams' expansive raunch for sweetness and modesty, Marston's songs have an artless simplicity that is reinforced by the gentle, restrained instrumentation on display. Throughout the album, Marston's delicately plucked or strummed acoustic guitar blends beautifully with spiralling traces of electric guitar, percussion and flute.

Several of the song titles – 'Hands on the Prairie', 'Mountain Rise', 'Porchlights', 'Seedbearer' – hint at a stilled, sparsely peopled America, an evocation underpinned by the deep reserves of rural imagery on which Marston's lyrics draw. 'If the sky is a roof above me/I ask this house, will you love me', she sings on 'My Dog Will Choose', in a voice of pure intimacy and affectlessness. *Redtail*'s gorgeous campfire vibe lends it a warmth and closeness that are utterly beguiling.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.boxtreerecords.com

Mary Hampton
Book One
UK NO LABEL NO NUMBER CD

At a time when it sometimes seems that one cannot move for new folk, free folk, freak folk, weird folk, outsider folk and goodness knows what else, it's an unqualified joy to discover a collection of songs that sit proudly and uncomplicatedly within the folk tradition. And yet, while Mary Hampton's début CD (a mini-album, really, with six tracks clocking in at 30 minutes) certainly derives much of its appeal from its appropriation of centuries-old folk idioms, it is certainly no museum piece. Its unearthly radiance and undercurrents of desolate modernity transform it into a vital and contemporary living document.

Hampton's musical and spiritual antecedents are the spectral English voices of Anne Briggs, Shirley Collins and Sandy Denny, although one also hears echoes of recent work by Marissa Nadler (reviewed in TSP #14) and that staple of otherworldly folk moves, the *Wicker Man* soundtrack. The album is subtitled 'six songs of refusal'; refusal of what? Characteristically, Hampton doesn't answer the question directly, relying instead on the latent imagery of her chosen texts and the icy chill of her voice to reinforce her message of hope and defiance against the iron grip of history.

Hampton is no prissy English waif; two of the six songs are flinty American ballads, and a third is a setting of a text by that most debauched and feverish of poets, Baudelaire. The two American songs, both narrated by female protagonists, bookend the album on similar notes of imprisonment and yearning: the woman in the opening 'Silver Dagger' 'wish[es] I was a little sparrow…one of those that flies so high', and the closing 'Fare Thee Well' laments: 'If I had wings like Noah's dove, I'd fly across the river to the one I love.' Yet while the narrator of 'Silver Dagger' withdraws into bold, self-willed solipsism ('I've decided to sleep alone all of my life'), the woman in 'Fare Thee Well' feels her sense of self dissolving in rapturous erotic surrender:

> 'But I've got a man, he's long and tall
> He moves his body like a cannonball…
> One of these mornings and it won't be long
> You'll hear my name but I'll be gone'

All the while, Hampton's bewitching voice and luminous acoustic guitar envelop these visions of escape in clouds of radiant beauty.

The Baudelaire adaptation, 'Eros', is one of the album's two highpoints, an epic seven-minute drama that recounts in chilling detail a dreamed encounter with a fiery-eyed lover. On this, the only one of the six tracks to be recorded with overdubs, piano, violin and sparse percussion thread their way ominously through the lyric's dark tracery of seduction and vulnerability. Hampton's voice is double-tracked for the words of the lover, creating a sense of unease that is compounded by the eerie stillness of the arrangement. At the

song's end, a woozy harmonium drone floats by, starkly dramatising the evanescence of the vision:

> 'And when I woke in the light of day
> I recalled the line of my lover's back
> I would not drink, and he took his leave
> But come back, love, come back.'

The album's other stand-out track, 'The Gardener', also proceeds for seven long minutes on waves of sinister violin and brushed percussion. The song's rapt imagery of colours, elements and flowers is framed by gorgeously languorous sonic increments and the barest hint of a rhythmic pulse. Her voice steeped in mythopoeic richness, Hampton sings like a prophesying angel: 'the mirk-black rain shall be your coat, with a wind-gale at your breast.'

Rounding out the set are two shorter, sunnier pieces, the traditional ballads 'Love Me Little' and 'Let No Man Steal Your Thyme' (the latter previously recorded by Anne Briggs, Shelagh McDonald, Sandy Denny and Pentangle). On these tracks Hampton turns to the tenor guitar, a four-stringed acoustic with a bright and bell-like timbre. With their gentle wordplay and attention to plants and flowers, these songs represent the folk lyric at its most idyllic and pastoral. In reclaiming them as songs of refusal, Mary Hampton declares her fidelity to the folk tradition while asserting a committed and self-assured engagement with the hopes and fears of the modern age.

RICHARD REES JONES

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Marissa Nadler
Songs III: Bird on the Water
UK PEACEFROG PFG096 CD (2007)

Marissa Nadler follows her earlier *Ballads of Living & Dying* and *The Saga of Mayflower May* (both reviewed in TSP #14) with this remarkable third album. *Bird on the Water* amplifies and extends Nadler's emotional concerns while retaining every ounce of the haunted Gothic spirituality that was the defining characteristic of those albums. Its songs resonate with a deeply unsettling power and grace; supernaturally preoccupied with love,

death and loneliness, they avoid morbidity and sentimentality by the richness and variety of their arrangements, by the rapturous imagery of Nadler's texts and by the bewitching beauty of her voice.

The great Canadian songwriter and poet Leonard Cohen is a looming presence throughout the record. The formality of its title acknowledges the many Cohen album titles that contain the word 'Songs'; the subtitle alludes to one of his most famous songs, 'Bird on the Wire'; there's a reverent cover of another Cohen classic, 'Famous Blue Raincoat'; and Nadler's acoustic guitar playing is glowingly reminiscent of Cohen's own before he traded guitars for cheap synthesisers. And just as Cohen's voice has weathered and deepened over the years, so Nadler's vocals are richer and stranger than on previous outings. Angelically pure, double-tracked and reverb-heavy, the voice sounds as though it emanates from a centuries-old courtly love tradition, a 1960s acid-folk magic spell and a post-apocalyptic future, all at once.

The other thing that sets *Bird on the Water* apart from its predecessors is the fullness and variety of its instrumentation. Co-produced by Nadler and Greg Weeks of US psych-folk outfit Espers, the album features hard, unflinching electric guitar from Weeks himself as well as dark cello from his Espers colleague Helena Espvall. The confidence of the arrangements is nowhere more apparent than on the album's extraordinary centrepiece 'Bird on Your Grave', which begins with spacey synthesised effects over plaintive strummed acoustic guitar, before opening out into a helter-skelter folk rock drama that recalls Fairport Convention at their most lysergic. The electric and percussive agitation subsides, but the landscape of the song has altered. Blasted where it once was delicate, Weeks continues his angsty riffing over Nadler's pealing acoustic cycles; and the song ends with a further dose of electronic strangeness.

The next track, 'Silvia', adds Dylanesque organ to Nadler's strong, resonant finger-picking style. The song's gorgeous melody and lilting chorus hint at a pop sensibility that sits comfortably alongside the record's more overtly folkish moments. These include the devastatingly sad 'Mexican Summer', on which Nadler's plangent guitar resounds beautifully around her seductive voice; the blissful, sparkling arpeggios of 'My Love and I'; and the delicate mandolin that courses playfully alongside the burrowing guitar patterns of 'Diamond Heart'.

Lyrically, *Bird on the Water* is shot through with startlingly vivid imagery. Nadler has the gift of both familiarising the strange and making the strange familiar; in the world of her songs, the elements of earth, air, fire and water mingle with skin, bones, hair and colours. It's also an intensely feminine world, in which '*I thought of you each time I tore off my gown'* ('Diamond Heart'), '*I'm going to buy you a red dress and put feathers in your hair'* ('Silvia') and '*she died all alone with her feathers and bows'* ('Leather Made Shoes'). Stripping away the outward manifestations of modesty and decorum, Nadler's texts conflate love, sex and death in a swooning current of feverish eroticism.

Nadler sings on 'Rachel': '*Oh what a day to dance with you, oh what a day to die'.* It's a line that encapsulates the album's unshakeable conviction that passion exists and is to be grasped through the infernal workings of tragedy. *Songs III: Bird on the Water* is a work of radical, deathly sensuality; to hear it is to be changed by it.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.marissanadler.com

G-U-I-T-A-R-S

MUSIC MADE WITH

Artur Nowak

Guitar Granulizer

POLAND emd.pl/records 003 CD (2004)

Whoa, what an exhausting listen! I have no idea what a guitar granulizer may be, but rest assured it's not the sort of domestic device you can purchase and plug in like a new blender or toaster. The term may describe Nowak's process, rather than an actual black box like an FX pedal. Plus there's evidence of a very extreme and restless cut-up methodology on this disc, which slams out 50 short tracks in 53 minutes in a totally relentless manner. You won't have time to pause for breath before the next hyper-processed episode comes roaring out like a souped-up electric eel with wings dipped in pancake batter…it's a bewildering, kaleidoscopic and fascinating listen. Each short opus is a very strong and convincing example of guitar-playing in itself, yet the sounds are also fed through multiple processing devices, resulting in a dazzling display of styles, modes, and sonic delights – from heavy metal noise to the extended-note Robert Fripp attack, to the mixed harmonies of Fred Frith…and more besides. Filters, delays, you name it…the cumulative effect of hearing these wildly varying textures of sound all smashed together is quite dizzying. Sometimes, you hear a musical idea or

statement that's so intriguing you wish it were explored for a little longer; but this is not allowed, according to the rules Nowak has set himself. If you play the guitar, you'll find enough ideas here to sustain a ten-LP career. And if you are actually a guitar, and you agreed to submit to this process, there would never be a dull moment in your life again. But is there really any need for Nowak to compress his work to this degree? I suppose it's all part of the granulization process. After all you can't make a bag of granulated sugar without smashing up 200 sugar cubes, preferably while wearing a kitchen gauntlet made of iron. This said, there is no real smashing in this music; it's not a deconstruction of the guitar, but probably the opposite. Nowak is rebuilding the sound of the guitar, digitally, on his own terms. Artur Nowak is the founder of this new Polish independent record label; be sure to look in this issue for another release, the great record by power-noise genius Robert Piotrowicz.

ED PINSENT 25/07/2006

http://emd.pl/records/

Greg Malcolm

Swimming in it

BELGIUM (K-RAA-K)[3] KED01 LP (2005)

Five beautiful instrumental pieces, for the most part built on a foundation of acoustic guitar work, with added percussion and melodies (almost) via electric guitars (or possibly acoustic with pickups), and some generalised droning atmospherics. Malcolm performs with conviction and there's a striking clarity in the recorded sound. Besides being a highly skilled player, Malcolm has built his own converted instruments to give him his special sound; it took him two years to build his personalised acoustic guitar alone, an instrument which has pick-ups mounted in unusual parts of the body to amplify things like bumps, scrapes, string vibrations and tuning nuts. Plus he has two guitars on the floor which he manipulates using his feet, e-bows and fans. Must be quite a thing to see him perform live. He's been working since 1996, fleeing New Zealand for Berlin, and producing collaborations, film and TV work besides his own records. With his instrumental set-up, he may he located somewhere in the Davenport / Matt Valentine area, but without any attempt to add 'magical' or 'weirdness' vibes of any sort; he eschews excessive use of electronic effects, for example, and the starkness of acoustical music is good enough for him. Not every piece is an ethereal dream of wispiness; 'Mob Job' for example (his version of an Ornette Coleman composition) has a stirring rhythm that's almost a marching beat, although the soldiers in this regiment are more like some grotesque goblins from Middle Earth. 'Staring at the Sun' is my favourite, with its vaguely Eastern influence and its simple beauty. A trancey record overall, where every track starts in a single key and stays there, and where the melodies seem to aspire to copying the intervals of old folk tunes (both English and American), but without really understanding what they're doing.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2006

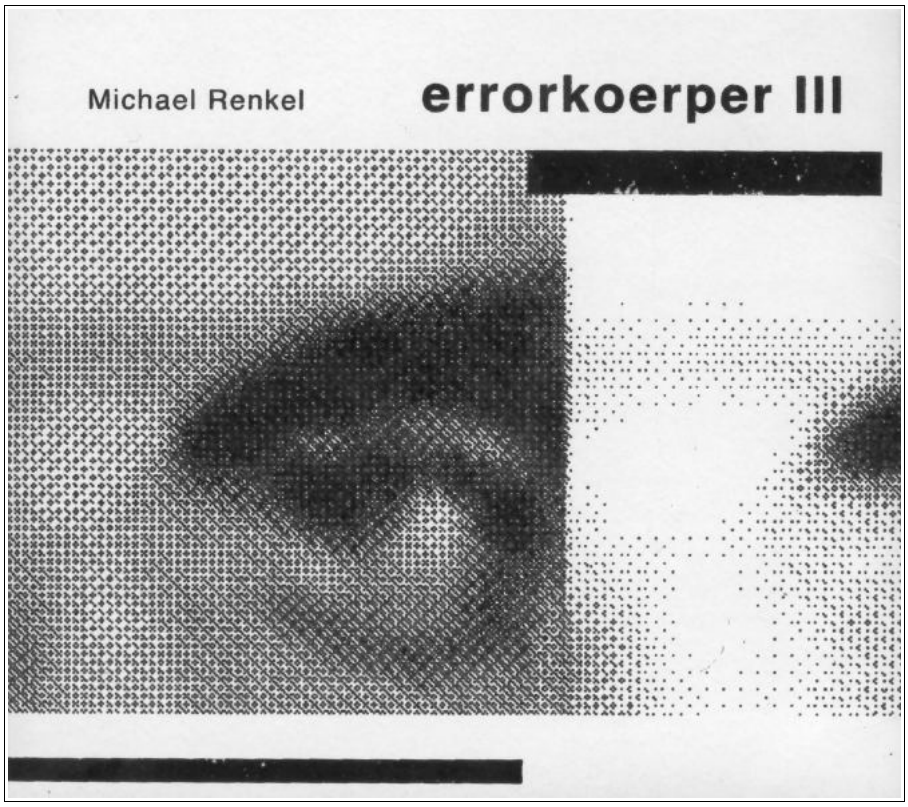
www.kraak.net

Michael Renkel

errorkoerper III

GERMANY ABSINTH RECORDS #9 CD (2005)

We've been following the work of this unique German for many years, and here is another exquisitely crafted masterpiece from his fingertips. This is the latest development in the ongoing *Errorkoerper* series which began many years ago. Listen and enter a sublime world of serene digital abstractions, as he weaves and spins cool deep-blue loops of sound from his set-up – one electric guitar, one FX processor, a



mixing desk and two laptops. The guitar is treated as 'a kind of nondirectional loop antenna transmitting the spatial sound to an affects processor, which alienates, boosts and distorts the filtered parameters.' While the resulting musical signals are sent into two laptop notebooks, the guitar is played with an e-bow or struck in percussive ways.

Natch, the sound of the guitar is completely transformed in this digital world; pretty much all you hear is 'pure' electronicness. But it's the patterns, repetitions, and stream of clear thinking that is the relevant process. 'The musical signals are held in a constant state of flux,' he describes. 'Constant motion and alienation of all elements can be connected and correlated simultaneously or alternatively.' Makes it sound so straightforward, but I take this as evidence that Renkel is one of the sharpest musicians working in Europe today. He is a total master at his game, somehow creating a sensation of infinite time as he fills these 67 minutes with utter assurance. He does it with great restraint, working patiently on these finely-embroidered textures with the devotion of a parishioner manufacturing a prayer-cushion for the local church. His strengths, in fine, are subtlety, surprise, deliberation, quietness, focus, economy; he works out his ideas meticulously, tries out daring combinations, and allows a natural development to progress where it will. It's great to hear something that doesn't insult your intelligence with superficial and flashy bleatings, but rather rewards the patient listener with a carefully-constructed, thought-through statement. The Absinth label has been home to those nifty compilations of local improve 'scenes' around Europe, which they represented with sets of mini-CDs mounted on hand-made sewn outsize sleeves. This release's package is a four-way gatefold package on sturdy card, with the artwork a combination of screenprinting and gouache paint, creating an artefact both sumptuous and tactile. Limited edition; much recommended.

ED PINSENT 29/10/2006

www.absinthRecords.com
www.michaelrenkel.de

Soft Black Star

Geneva in neve

ITALY PULVER & ASCHE RECORDS P&A001 CD (2005)

Fine little guitar record, guitar and other instruments to be precise; four tracks in about 25 minutes, and it's all full of naive, rugged, home-made charm, fashioned by a primitive futurist who is amazed by technology. Soft Black Star, who apparently 'goes direct in the interesting Swiss music scene', is some way from being a John Fahey imitator; in fact he seems to ignore the basic rules of guitar playing completely, perhaps through lack of conventional skill (not a bad thing). Yet he keeps on plucking anyway, filled with inspiration and hope, attempting each time to piece together a coherent statement in his broken, halting phrases. Actually his music is a lot better than

I'm making out! Besides the guitar, which seems to be centre-piece instrument, he uses piano, banjo, radio set and voice. On 'Kung-Folk im Kindergarten' he adds distant 'crackles' sampled from an old 78 rpm disc, while his hands wrest a clever update on Blues-influenced music from the guitar strings. 'Geneva in Neve' is the longest (10 mins) piece and has the entire contents of both cities in the title layered on top of it, including added fizz from laptop malarkey and samples; a truly kaleidoscopic vision of urban life, painted in music. 'Jandek Promenade' may be a bit too 'clever' as a title, but the music on that cut is still good if you forget he's trying to pay tribute to that phoney 'outsider' of the guitar. Soft Black Star also claims influences from fellow primitives Jad Fair and Richard Youngs. In all a strong and idiosyncratic record, made in 2005 on a four-track device. Their motto... 'Soul first, technique later'. In this case, it's 'technique never', and let's hope it stays that way.

ED PINSENT 23/07/2006

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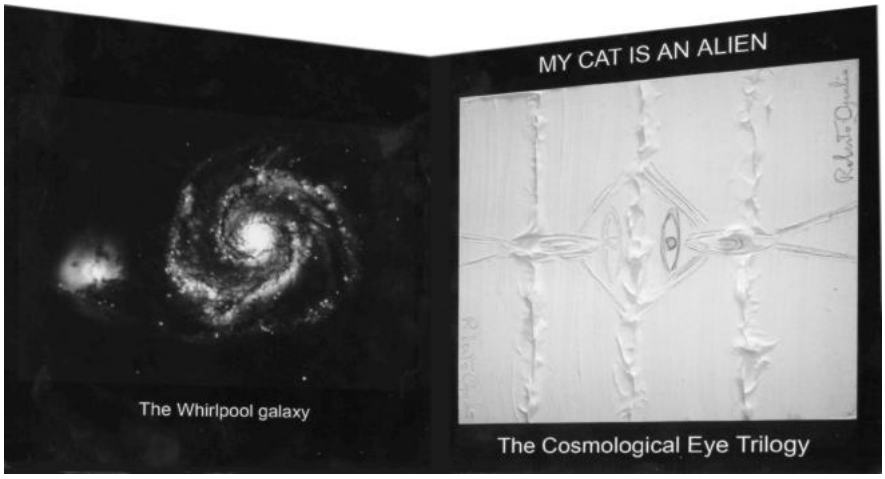
My Cat Is An Alien

Plutonian Flames

ITALY OPAX RECORDS OPX 016/017 2 x CDR (2005)

A two-disc journey in which those intrepid interstellar explorers in search of intelligent life (no doubt because there ain't much evidence of it down here on planet Earth) the Opalio brothers orbit the ninth big rock out from the Sun and record their impressions of the wondrous phenomena they find in sonic art. A slow percussion-dominated minimalist introduction gives way to guitar radio transmissions and other strange (also guitar-generated) noises conveying information about the shrieking winds, the odd storm here and there, and various eddies threatening to become something mega observed on the planet. Amazing that such detailed and sculptured soundscapes of the Plutonian environment plus a sense of the desolation and the extreme conditions there can be conveyed so effectively via a limited range of instruments: just electric guitars, drums and other percussion, and various toys with no outtakes or overdubs. There's an insinuation that some weird, possibly biomechanoid form of life in which alien metals substitute for hydrogen, carbon, oxygen and nitrogen to form the basic structures for life, is slowly awakening within the shimmering waves of guitar and the clouds of cymbals.

Each CD-R divides into two parts: on Disc one, part two involves a more thorough exploration of the Plutonian world: streaks of guitar flash by like calls of alien bird-like forms while a tribal rhythm is being drummed. A long drone is accompanied by a whistle as if through the strange atmosphere something is calling out a message to the explorers. Sections of the piece sound rather like field recordings being taken in a very forbidding Earth environment under extreme meteorological conditions - but of course that's what the Opalio men would claim to be doing here. Disc two, like Disc one, also begins very slowly and tentatively but with a lone guitar sounding familiar with actual notes being plucked: a quivering drone joins in and part three builds up with a beating drum rhythm and a whistle among other effects into a beautiful rolling minimalist improv tapestry. Part



four develops very quickly with passages of squiggly guitar entwined with caterwauling guitar slides, throbbing drums and trembling drones. The mood changes from sort of meditative on Part three to an urgent suggestion of a build-up to a great climax or trouble ahead. About halfway through, the piece goes through an industrial drone phase which continues the momentum; eddies and sonic swirls surround the drone which reaches a feverish high pitch as if the explorers have had to get the hell out of the place and off the planet in their space pod. Eventually the piece calms down and continues quietly to the end with a rumbling drone that explodes into a storm of chatter, static, a rubbery noise and electric simmer.

Altogether a very fascinating trip of guitar noise and trancey drone that immerses you in sci-fi soundscapes where the strangest weather phenomena and the exotic landforms and biology test and force you to question everything you think you know. Whether the Opalios want to make another trip here or venture even farther into the more distant reaches of the solar system where the tenth planet Sedna and the Kuiper Belt of rocky debris beckon is not yet known but whatever the duo decide to do, you know the result promises to be another interesting and surprising experience.

JENNIFER HOR

www.mycatisanalien.com

My Cat Is An Alien

The Cosmological Eye Trilogy

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 072/73/74 3 x CD (2005)

Very good round-up reissue of three rare CDRs, which were originally issued on the Opalio brothers' own home-made label in very limited editions and came out in nice tactile art packages. The packages, comprising small slabs of wood hand-painted by Roberto Opalio, are photographed in the insert here. I've got to admit I own two of the originals, but I was lucky, and they only came out two years ago. If you missed them, here's your chance to own them in a handy single purchase and with additional related tracks (including a 14-minute introductory piece) besides. Actually, it makes a lot more sense to hear these three interconnected works this way. The introduction in particular is very Sun Ra, declamatory and forthright, announcing the themes of the trilogy with some justifiable pride and somehow promising revelatory, cosmic experiences to the listener.

The trilogy delivers just that, if you listen. The works are intended as meditations, three dedicated explorations of various galaxies in outer space, which are described with texts and photographs in purely scientific and factual terms in the booklet, while the corresponding musical portraits of them are completely fanciful, conjectural, and imaginative – pure science fiction in sound! Mostly recorded in 2003-04, although 'Into the Sleeping Beauty Galaxy' is from 2000 and has Viggiu Vortex guesting on the cymbals. Entire remainder is executed by Maurizio and Roberto Opalio, entering into long dreamy trances in their private performance

area, the 'space room' at their home in Torino. Very slow, long-form instrumental works for electric guitars, more electric guitars, effects pedals, and amplifiers, with very sparing percussion every so often. The grandeur and mystery of the cosmos is expressed by long, extended guitar notes and the fluttering and twittering of their battery-driven effects pedals, left to themselves to witter and whirr like the tiny motors of ultra-efficient flying saucers hovering in space. Kaleidoscopic, rotating sonic effects result; play the entire set in one sitting to yourself, starting at midnight, while you stare at the night sky with your telescope.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2006
www.lastvisibledog.com
www.mycatisanalien.com

My Cat is an Alien

"...Ascends the Sky"

USA REBIS / WHITENED SEPULCHRE WS001 CD (2006)

The original *Ascends The Sky* was released in 2001 and issued as a very limited edition CDR on the Opalio brothers' own OPAX label, with a special artwork. Here are both those original pieces of music again, along with a 2005 recording which is a 'meditation' on the theme. This meditation opens the disc and is a very strong work; beautiful, fragile, guitar minimalism, with percussion, amplifier buzz and alien effects. I prefer it to the earlier pieces; it seems to have more variety and direction. There's also a connection to the poetry of William Blake, a most fitting role model for these incurable Romantics. An above-average collection from the Alien Ones, with attractive 'bare tree' cover art.

ED PINSENT 26/11/2006

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Glands of External Secretion / My Cat Is An Alien

From The Earth To The Spheres Volume 5 split CD

UK VERY FRIENDLY / CARGO VF023 CD (2006)

Latest in a series of MCIAA projects of which this is the CD trade edition. The original luxury package was a vinyl collector's press in an edition of 100 copies, with a Roberto Opalio painting sewn into the sleeve. As usual it's a split record, as MCIAA never actually meet up to record jam sessions with the illustrious underground heroes in their circle, but they do offer them one half of an LP to make of what they will. Glands are that San Francisco duo, the very good singer and songwriter Barbara Manning and the mysterious Seymour Glass (ex-*Bananafish* editor). You never know what these two zanies will do next, each release different to the last. Joined by Nels Cline on the lap steel guitar, they use keyboards and tape manipulation on 'Icebox (Defrosted Mix)' to recreate exactly the effects of riding inside a flying saucer: motors humming, navigation systems going out of control, floating through unknown galaxies. 1950s sci-fi movie sound effects are given a new charge through powerful imagination, and simple, hands-on sound production; no lazy

laptopping or electronic short-cuts for these heroes.

The Cat Alien Brothers offer us 21 minutes of 'After The Meteor Shower', depicting in sound a desolated world ruined by the onslaught of this unwanted visit of astral debris in stony form. Space winds and other howling sound effects add local colour. The usual solemn and slow droning I associate with MCIAA is in evidence, on the one side weighted down by heavy tympani drums, on the other given wings by a celestial voice choir and gaseous clouds of cymbals.

ED PINSENT 28/08/2006
www.cargorecords.co.uk
www.mycatisanalien.com

Painting Petals on Planet Ghost

Painting Petals on Planet Ghost
USA TIME-LAG RECORDS 030 LP (2006)

My Cat Is An Alien acoustic side-project showcasing the voice of Ramona Ponzini; the boys back her up with their atmospheric confections, using bells, accordion, percussion and acoustic guitars, forsaking their familiar effects-drenched electric guitars and amplification. Ramona doesn't deliver songs so much as vocal recitations, meandering abstractions whose allusive meanings are quite opaque. Added to this, the players visited and made the recordings in certain 'mystical locations' in the Alps, the better to explore this Herman Hesse-styled side of their collective psyche. This chosen milieu, and the wispy instrumentation, does much to expose their basic weaknesses as musicians, but the collection does have its fair share of compelling mood-moments.

ED PINSENT 30/08/2006

www.time-lagrecords.com
www.mycatisanalien.com

Matthew de Gennaro

Humbled Down
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 077 CD (2006)

Blah! Another shitty modern acoustic guitarist who wants to be John Renbourn, with a CD that shows some early promise but quickly degenerates into a set of banal melodies picked out like beginner's exercises on the steel strings. He adds occasional flourishes on violin, banjo etc, freely mixing elements of folk, blues, and country music with an irritating superficiality. Come in halfway through and you'll mistake this for music from 'Tales from the Riverbank' or 'Camberwick Green'. Lightweight and corny.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

Stefano Pilia

Healing memories and other scattering times
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 051 CD (2005)

An Italian aesthete wallows in his healing memories on this, another Last Visible Droner. At least this one showcases a lot of guitars among all the layers of electronic wash, and those six strings help to contribute an additional richness that may signal the end of Rosy Parlane's reign of terror. On these recordings from 2002-05, Pilia turns in long-form, instrumental drones, mostly pretty shapeless, but pinned down with a good solid root chord which keeps the structure from turning into a pile of grey and pink mush. He does most of it with his guitars and loops of said guitars on one track and feedback from amplifiers on a couple more tracks. Valerio Tricoli, that notorious ultra-minimalist from the Bowindo label, contributes invisible electronic vapourings on one cut; Massimo Carozzi likewise intervenes helpfully with his synth and turntable on another. A flock of birds streams across the sky on the front cover. This is introverted, cloud-gazing stuff, fit for a contemplative fellow nursing old wounds and attempting to mend rifts with his mind. There is a lot of warmth and honesty in Pilia's work, if not much variety. Look for his forthcoming CD on Sedimental.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

Stefan Neville

Do Not Destroy
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 088 CD (2006)

Brief mention for this fairly routine collection of home-taping, made on a two-track by this Australian solo superstar who is also Pumice; his languid and loopy *Raft* CD (also on LVD) was noted last issue. Here, he has moments of glory as he deploys his ramshackle instrumental set-up of guitars, drums, organs and effects, but these flashes of brilliance reside mostly in the grungy processes such as distortion, wild edits, and careless overdubbing, rather than in the quality of the musical content or the performance. Of personal interest to me, as he recorded it all after a stint of filing work for the Australian Government, and presumably needed a bout of frenetic creativity to recover from the boredom of the experience. Accordingly the sleeve art resembles a civil service file cover, marked up with referral and destruction dates, and printed instructions for phase-box assembly. All these things are close to my archival / records management heart! Neville is undoubtedly a lo-fi hero, but I wouldn't have him working in an archive under my care.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2006

www.lastvisibledog.com

The Discurator's Den

Records are our Apple Turnovers

Various
Touch 25
UK TOUCH TONE 25 CD (2006)

Extremely strong and in fact an extremely beautiful compilation, on a par with previous 'greats' in this Touch / Ash International series which have been curated mostly by label owner Mike Harding, such as *A Fault In The Nothing*, *Antitrade*, and *T_Zero_3*. This one has 25 tracks of music and sound, hinting at all manner of mystery, ideas, and wonderment, arranged in a compelling sequence; your attention is riveted; 80 minutes will just fly by in a blur of wonder, bliss and quiet amazement. Most of the regular Touch artistes are here, including Philip Jeck, Ryoji Ikeda and Chris Watson; it feels like too long since we've heard a full-length release from Jeck or Ikeda. Plus Oren Ambarchi, Fennesz, Pita Rehberg, Pan Sonic, Jakob Kirkegaard, Rafael Toral, Bruce Gilbert, Rosy Parlane, Biosphere, and Mark Van Hoen. And there's not so much of the 'editorialising' that Harding used to be so fond of, apart from a few scattered one-minute interstices of found sound and spoken word interludes.

There's hardly a weak moment of music on the whole CD, but for me the shining examples include four of my favourites. Oren Ambarchi, with 'Moving Violation', eight minutes of genius bumped up near the start of the running order; one can't forget his recent work with Sunn O))), and accordingly this guitar piece comes across as a kind of abstracted diagram of Black Metal, effected by Oren's usual method of switching between extremely heavy (but not loud) guitar sounds in his patented top-secret complex FX pedal set-up. Marvy! Philip Jeck of course, with six minutes of 'Hindquarters', a deeply moving and nostalgic episode loosened from the old-photograph volumes of his vinyl records and faulty turntables. Ryoji Ikeda, moving away from his familiar grid-methods with 'Untitled #25' and entering into new realms of dynamic, near-human beauty with his computer-based virtual music. And both the field-recording pieces by Chris Watson, less than three minutes apiece, yet continuing to demonstrate his supreme powers of listening, finding, framing, and arranging examples of rare beauty at the remote corners of the globe.

Indeed if there is a 'theme' to all these works, it's evidence of artists and human beings each finding alternative spaces to live in, spaces where creative thought may flourish and positive action can take place, outside of the normal world of aeroplanes, iPods, fast food, mortgages and people who talk too much on the bus. If such worlds cannot be found, then they can be built in sound: Bruce Gilbert proposes 'Sliding Off the World', Rosy Parlane visits the myth world of Atlantis, Fennesz stops to simply contemplate the universe in a single tree. Ikeda will draw maps for us; Jeck will be our archivist. This view of our circumstances becomes even more

plausible when a lot of like-minded souls are saying it, as is the case here; and the arrangement of *Touch 25* makes subtle connections, weaving gossamer threads between each piece, alluding to the hidden consonances and responses through sympathetic editing. A grand survey of the hidden state of the 21st century; to find out what's really going, don't watch Channel Four News, but listen to this comp instead. Is this a totally flawless compilation? I think it is.

ED PINSENT 22/07/2006

www.touchmusic.org.uk

6majik9
A polka lips now
USA FOXGLOVE / DIGITALIS INDUSTRIES FOXGLOVE100 2 x CD-R (ND)

Cynics among us may sneer at the black-and-white theme here, it having been used so many thousands of times by bands in the past to demonstrate their versatility or their music's Jekyll-and-Hyde nature, some doing it better than others. Certainly the idea comes in handy for the CD sleeve design especially if it is handmade and has to be photocopied to keep costs down (and creepy photographs of people dressed in tribal ceremonial garb look even creepier in black and white). The first disc, titled 'black / a cry for help' is a vigorous set of music rocking out early on and boasting some very strong rhythms and melodies. Urgent singing is accompanied by acoustic guitar and spaced-out atmospheric effects, high-pitched flutey warblings and amateurish drumming early on. Though the music is one continuous track lasting some 40 minutes, there are distinct passages with clear breaks in-between some of them and the whole thing seems like a cross between devious versions of both Kemialliset Ystävät and Avarus at their most delirious and shambolic.

From the twentieth minute to the thirtieth, the music is a mad drunken jig with lots of wooden stomping and crazed singing, and then for the last ten minutes or so of the piece, the music lurches about everywhere - seems the musicians enjoyed themselves a little too much on the homemade moonshine (be careful with how much brake fluid you put in there. lads) - but enthusiastic drumming draws it all together especially towards the end where everything again becomes overwhelming, this time from sheer repetition.

The second disc, 'white / taught ya', is no less busy initially but then settles onto a sedate, even reverential and atmospheric, direction: spacey metal effects abound and there is simple organ-like melody playing in the background. For much of this recording, the music seems self-absorbed and insular though plenty of eccentricity is on display and simple metallic drumming ups the volume level slightly and provides some backbone. Faint repetitive singing can be heard. After the 25th minute, the players embark on a wild ride through dark space, effects are whooshing everywhere, and soon all arrive at some spooky location deep in the farthest zones of the universe: gravity is weak here, things seem a bit unfocused for a time. Distant flute and percussion keep up a jaunty pace. Close to the end the music changes abruptly with wild electric guitar bursting in but all settles down after somebody starts coughing.

So the two CD-Rs do turn out to be different yet similar, each very much the other's twin but both generally inhabiting the more shadowy regions of the psychedelic folk territory where the faerie people are less the Disneyfied Tinkerbell cutesies and more the powerful and malevolent creatures that haunted the imaginings of mediaeval Europeans. Play this double set at your own risk ...

JENNIFER HOR

www.digitalisindustries.com

666majik999

The ice dragon that ate bolivia

AUSTRALIA MUSICYOURMINDWILLLOVEYOU CD MYMWLY0047 (ND)

Relabelling themselves 666majik999 as if to solicit aid and inspiration from denizens of unseen dimensions above and below (between you and me, I don't think they really needed any extra help!), these musicians, one of whom I think is also a member of Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood, deliver eight tracks of wild and wacky 'psychfolk' that to me seem more akin to the chaos that is free noise / drone duo Hototogisu than to most of the other acts associated with musicyourmindwillloveyou or the US label Digitalis Industries. Periods of sheer hellish turmoil alternate with quiet and serene yet paradoxically busy ambient passages, often within the one track as on 'while the sleep rest'. We also get the expected acoustic guitar 'folk' stuff, if off-kilter and deranged tribal-sounding folk music that makes even wild jigs from the most isolated rural mountain folk in the Appalachian backwoods of the US or Tasmania in Australia (you know, the sort of white trash people who supposedly breed one-eyed babies with twenty digits on each hand and foot) look pedestrian, is your cup of nettle tea. Passages

where the musicians don't seem all that different from, say, The No Neck Blues Band or Wooden Wand and The Vanishing Voice will have you wondering when the majik ones will fall off the deep end yet again, that's the only predictable thing about them. One of the best tracks is 'russian flush', a pummelling, mesmerising mass percussion trance stomp, but the rest are not far behind when it comes to mucking seriously with your mind and damaging it beyond recognition - and maybe your body will follow where your mind has gone: yes, it will start clunking and shuffling in a caveman dance of its own accord ...

JENNIFER HOR

http://mymwly.blogspot.com

Ian Helliwell

Workshop of the World

UK SUPERBO 003 2 x CD (2005)

A groovy home-made and home-grown artefact issued by a UK Brighton-based genius, apparently realised in and published from his bedroom. The presentation is lavish and colourful, the discs are recordable CDs with adhesive labels, and the artwork is nothing you couldn't do yourself with an Epson Stylus and a pack of Premium Photo glossy paper. Helliwell also plays everything – guitars, bass, drums, synths, radio, tapes, and analogue electronics from his own home-made tone generators – and overdubs himself using basic four-track technology. There's a lot of music here, 41 tracks over two discs, but it's all jolly and melodic pop material, always with infectious beats, often with vocals.

Helliwell has been playing in bands since the 1980s. He started building his own tone generators – called the Hellitrons – in the 1990s, arising from his interest in building and modifying 9-volt circuitry. He uses them as soundtracks for his own Super-8mm movies, and does it in public too – something of a local hero in Brighton, with his light shows, projections, film shows, installations, concerts and club nights. With the discipline you'd associate with any good art student graduate, this release also adheres to a concept: a concept wherein the creator posits himself as a white-coated, bespectacled scientist of electronic sound-art, pastes tons of nostalgic *Tomorrow's World* popular science imagery on his sleeves, and uses apt titles such as 'Alpha Particle', 'Robot Arm', 'Atom Smasher', 'Guidance Systems On', 'Chemical Leak' and – natch – 'The Boffin'. To top it all off, many of his squelchy synth instrumentals are clearly intended to evoke 1970s TV soundtrack cues, and fleeting images of William Woollard or Kieran Prendiville will flash across the minds of those over a certain age.

In all, this set is an admirable pop-art music concept, and very well-performed too. The only weakness I can find is that the actual melodies are a little under-worked, and half the time he can't really structure a pop song successfully (it's not as easy as you might think). But this remains a quirky delight, and continued evidence of the influence of UK pop-art maestro Jeff Keen in Brighton.

ED PINSENT 29/10/2006

www.ianhelliwell.co.uk

Praxinoscope

Praxinoscope

ITALY A SILENT PLACE CP 99 LP (2006)

Picture disc containing another My Cat Is An Alien side project, teaming Ramona Ponzini (bells, wind chimes) with Roberto Opalio (voice and live electronics). This project shows them in minimal, acoustic and percussive mode. The transparent simplicity of their approach – all live performances, no overdubs, utterly minimal, and only enhanced with a small amount of echo – is commendable, endearing, and works well for the most part. Roberto's voice is the predominant effect, and either resembles fragments of Luciano Berio records, or sounds like an odd stringed or reed instrument with its keening tones. As usual, very strong on the atmosphere; it's like a perpetual opening to an Orthodox Church ceremony, replete with incense and bells, except that the service never really begins and the murmuring speech never turns into a coherent Latin liturgy. For all its pleasantness, this music is very unstructured, but if you enjoy floating in a state of constant suspended animation then you'll have a good time.

ED PINSENT 21/10/2006

www.mycatisanalien.com

Michel Blanc

Le Passage Éclair

FRANCE D'AUTRES CORDES RECORDS d'ac071 CD (2005)

Drummer and percussionist Blanc is also a composer and member of Push The Triangle, a Parisian-based combo influenced by jazz and contemporary music and rock. Here, that trio is supplemented by a double bass player and a vocalist, Mederic Collignon. The opening title track certainly delivers good energetic semi-melodic noise propelled by crisp and speedy drumming; this alone raised my hopes, but remainder of CD reveals merely another loopy

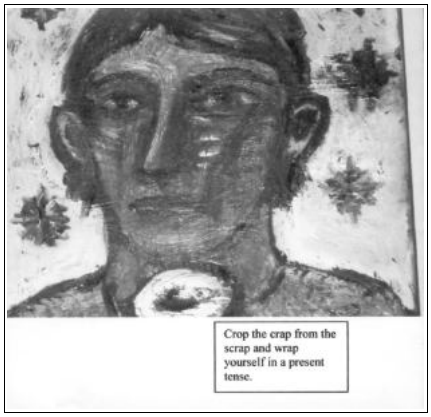
French art-rock combo who indulge themselves with annoying 'circus'-like moves to keep their audience entertained. Franck Vigroux adds many a corny 'rock' styled riff with his guitar, although he's better when he does live electronics – like on 'Rituel Organique' for example. Stéphane Payen blurts it out on the sax, adding a faux-jazz effect that'll convey the experience of shopping in the FNAC mall in Les Halles. There is some undoubted attack and energy in places, largely due to the excellent efforts of drummer and leader Michel Blanc. But then they ruin everything with a track like 'The Dream of the Machines', which is a pretty corny sci-fi idea in the first place, and musically sounds like it was cranked out in 1968 by some deluded festival promoters hoping to cash in on the success of *Barbarella*. Nine studio recordings from 2003-2005; may be worth seeking out the good parts, if you can get past the clichéd riffing, the noodling instrumentals, and the god-awful scat-singing track.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2006

www.myspace.com/pushthetriangle
www.digitruc.com

Ennio Morricone
Crime and Dissonance
USA IPECAC RECORDINGS IPC66 2 x CD (2005)

For once the label fondly known by some as Ipecrap Recordings has put out a really interesting and superb release: a compilation of soundtrack pieces composed by Italian movie soundtrack maestro Ennio Morricone for a number of movies outside the paella / spaghetti western genre mostly made between 1969 and 1974. Tracks aren't chronologically ordered but are arranged such that the mood or atmosphere at the end of one piece is taken up by the one immediately following and so the different excerpts of music form a chain of moods, impressions and suggestions that could be an ur-soundtrack to an imaginary Italian-made ur-movie of the early 1970s that reflects all the political, cultural and economic trends and changes then sweeping the country. Jazz, psychedelic influences, shimmering percussion, archly sounding electric guitars, pompous pseudo-church organs, strings, gaspy female vocals and even mouth harp may all be found here, often on the same tracks with the intent of confounding and unsettling movie (and movie music) audiences with the ambiguous moods and atmospheres produced or embellished by such a clash of instruments or music genres.
Throughout these two discs the moods and



atmospheres are never less than chilling or foreboding. There are two pieces on both discs on which Morricone collaborated with the Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza which are short, tight and urgent jazzy instrumentals featuring runaway percussion rhythms.

The attention Morricone gave to each soundtrack, as suggested by the excerpts selected, with respect to details of musical arrangements and timing (not to mention his own enthusiasm) is such that you don't necessarily need to know the movies these tracks were composed for to enjoy and thrill to the music. If you must know, however, many of the movies from which the pieces were selected belong to a distinctive Italian movie genre known as giallo which combined elements of crime, mystery, slasher horror, grand guignol drama and soft-porn: a stock character in many of these movies was the serial masked murderer who killed his or her victims while wearing long black leather gloves. Indeed one piece on Disc one, 'L'Uccello Con Le Piume Di Cristallo (Titoli)', from the Dario Argento movie of the same name (apart from the 'Titoli' bit) is quite creepy with just an ongoing and agonising sequence of a woman gasping or being throttled while a heart beats in the background. Spy and more conventional horror movies including an *Exorcist* rip-off (well, it was the early 1970s), a documentary and what looks like a film of a series of surrealistic film sketches of the 70s super-model Veruschka (well, yes, it was the early 70s!) are also featured on this set.

The CD booklet features colour and black-and-white photos of several movies from which excerpts of their soundtracks appear on the discs: many photos such as one of a scene from *Il Gatto A Nove Code* in which a woman holds a blood-stained tissue in front of her face, suggest powerful psychosexual themes and concerns in the movies. The only part of the booklet (and indeed of the entire package) I don't care for is John Zorn's fawning comparison of Maestro Mozza with Ipecac Recordings honcho Mike Patton: it's like comparing the Italian movie industry of the 50s - 70s with their genre equivalents being churned out by today's Hollywood.

JENNIFER HOR

Ipecac Recordings: www.ipecac.com
References: Killing In Style: Reflections about the Giallo,
http://www.killinginstyle.blogspot.com/
Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giallo

TapeNoise
Life is this Crop
UK NO LABEL CDR

Solo CDR by a mystery UK guy. He has a peculiar and idiosyncratic approach to electronic music and electro-acoustic composition, but he does it with a lot of imagination and more often than not with convincing results. Many ideas are tried: poetry readings alongside queasy electronic sounds; the morphing of countryside field recordings, so that a shepherd seems to become his own sheepdog; and layering of old vinyl LPs alongside discordant instrumentals. Cryptic messages, relayed by text and photograph, adorn the cover of this faintly disquieting release.

ED PINSENT 29/10/2006

www.tapenoise.co.uk

Go:gol
Gorymaaz
GERMANY A-MUSIK A28 CD (2005)

A one-man band runs riot, indulging his whims and fancies as he's seized with the overdubbing mania that afflicts many who enter the recording studio. Is there no musical style he won't pastiche? A superficial listen will reveal echoes here of Can, Neil Young, The Homosexuals and even Steely Dan! To realise his ambitions, Mr Gol plays virtually any musical device he can

seize in his twig-like fingers, and spreads tons of his grotesquely mannered vocalising on the top – more like scatting in pure trans-continental gibberish, and emitted in a highly nasal way that gets irritating real quick. Then again, his layered instrumental confections can grow on you, best exhibited when he shuts his mouth completely, for example on the wired-up psych-electronic mayhem of 'Soup'. Some soup...there's more than carrots and oxtails in this boy's daily broth, I'll wager! The rest of the album contains plenty of funky bass slaps, crisp snare sounds, extreme electronic noise-bursts, and guitar strafing delivered in a very snakey and scrapey way. He even does a parody of Euro-Techno electronica, complete with weedy and sarcastic beats. Hard to tell if this fellow is a wacky post-everything parodist or what, but his endearing quirks and kitchen-sink approach to making a record may please some. The sleeve art delivers a visual analogue to his malarkey, plastered with dozens of intense full-colour artworks, each one shrunk to size of a 2-Euro stamp.

ED PINSENT 11/10/2006

www.a-musik-com
www.a-gogol.com

La Société des Timides à la Parade des Oiseaux

Le Combat Occulté
USA BETA-LACTAM RING RECORDS mt047b CD (2005)

Here's a French ensemble with a decidedly unwieldy name who have amassed enough material over their career to present this 22-track collection of previously unreleased tracks, alternative versions and live recordings. Spanning the years 1984 to 1993 (it's unclear from the information provided whether the band is still in existence or not), the set depicts La STPO as a fairly driven avant-prog outfit, situated somewhere between Henry Cow, their descendants the Art Bears and the more discordant elements of King Crimson.

The danger with presenting an after-the-fact compilation such as this is that its contents might fail to cohere as a single piece of work. And there is indeed a patchwork and rather fragmentary feel to the album, with eleven of the tracks clocking in at under two minutes. These sound like sketches of or extracts from longer songs rather than self-contained compositions. Singer Pascal Godjkian's vocal stylings (in French), meanwhile, come across as rather too arch and declamatory for my tastes.

When La STPO hit their stride musically, however, the album becomes hugely enjoyable. 'L'Explosionniste' kicks off with a deeply satisfying eruption of Ayleresque skronk from the sax of Franck Fagon, before turning to more conventional but still rich episodes for guitar and woodwind. Elsewhere, Fripp-quality splintery guitar lines are pitted against lurching avant songcraft reminiscent of the Art Bears at their most visceral. It's in this mode, on lengthy tracks like 'Avant' and 'Un', that La STPO are at their most daring and striking. Guitarist Jim B provides a marvellously detailed piece of cover art, depicting a flock of large, gleeful birds ransacking an archive. Reels of master tape dangle triumphantly from the birds' beaks as the library's human creators look on aghast.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.blrrecords.com

Alejandra and Aeron

Porto (Folklore Fragments Volume 2)
SPAIN LUCKY KITCHEN LK 027 CD (2005)

It's hard to know what to make of this lot, what is essentially a collection of field recordings from a period the two As spent in Porto, the Port-capital of Portugal thanks to some handy green fronted by the Fundação Serralves. It's a diverse enough bunch of material, although by their own admission they have a preference for the 'old and weathered', which tends to lead them quite naturally toward recording for the most part what are sounds seen as associated with various

traditions in danger of disappearing in the face of modern life.

It's hard to know what to make of this album because it's hard to know exactly what role it's looking to perform. The CD is presented as a collection of 'folklore fragments', although the fragments that they have chosen seem to have been determined purely by their own aesthetic preferences. So the CD lacks something in the way of scientific vigour, yet this is precisely what they seem to be arguing for in the liner notes. At the same time it's worth noting a rejection of the type of field recording exemplified by Chris Watson on their website, deploring Watson's random presentation of exotic sounds removed from their context as some sort of sonic colonialism.

The duo's ongoing 'folklore' project seems to situate itself somewhere in the hazy, crazy world between art and science (with emphasis on the 'art'). Despite the social context that they've attempted to find for the sounds here however, it's hard to see their sonic portrait of Porto as much more than a romantic one, something that doesn't I imagine lend itself to a terribly realistic view of life. But then perhaps that's not what they aiming at. Viewed as a bunch of sounds from the home of world football's permanent underachievers it's actually not bad at all.

AARON ROBERTSON

aaland@luckykitchen.com
www.luckykitchen.com

Various Artists

Run the Road Volume 2
USA 679 RECORDINGS LTD / VICE RECORDINGS VICE 8 2564-62731-2 6 CD (2005)

Curious to check out the substance beneath the hype over grime, I got this compilation which as the title says is the sequel to *Run the Road Volume 1* which I understand is the first ever grime compilation and as far as I know was well received by critics on both sides of the Atlantic pond in early 2005. I confess I hadn't heard any grime before getting this second volume and have had to rely on Internet (mainly Wikipedia.org) and foreign magazine sources to find out anything about the music so please be warned my review is set out against this context. Now I've heard mpegs of three tracks on the first compilation and my impression is of a music in which complex electronic beats and funky rhythms derived from reggae and garage (or what used to be called house music, London house, whatever) go head2head with lightning-fast rapping creating an interesting tension between music and words. On this follow-up, the stop-start beats, the rhythms and the stutter are there but seem secondary to the words to the extent where on some tracks they are just a minimalist background to the rapping. I have the impression that the tracks here were selected to appeal to a mainstream US audience's expectations of what hiphop should be (or if you prefer, what a marketing exec at some humungous record label believes would appeal to a mainstream US audience). Some of the middle tracks like Crazy Titch's 'World Is Crazy' and Klashnekoff's 'Can't You See?' could be generic US hiphop if you take out the electronic music backing. And a track that namechecks various locations around England on the otherwise good 'Up Your Speed Remix', sung by various MCs, seems too much like a marketing ploy to emphasise the 'British' aspect of the compilation, as if people in the US can't pick up Black British English and Jamaican / West Indian accents and slang.

On the plus side we have the strong opener 'Get Set (Run the Road edition)' where several MCs each get 16 lines to go hell for leather improvising their rhymes before the chorus sweeps them out of the way; No Lay's hard-edged no-nonsense Cockney-accented 'Unorthodox Chick' which proves that when girls (I prefer to call them girls rather than bitchin' ho's) get the chance they can rap harder than the guys; and heaps of speed-of-light fast rapping and toasting with lyrics that by turns are bantering, boastful, angry, reproachful and often very comic. On one very funny track you can imagine a chap who drinks up glug-glug-glug, feels pretty satisfied, gets up and promptly falls through a glass barrier. Not a bad collection of music on the whole and a lot of it is better than most commercial rap but I do have the sneaking suspicion that this compilation doesn't represent the full range of grime as it presently stands in the UK and that both the music and its potential audience (the people who'd appreciate it for what it is rather than whether it fits a stereotype) come off as half-arsed victims in thrall to the music industry's worship of the Almighty Dollar.

JENNIFER HOR

Vice Recordings: www.vice-recordings.com
Atlantic Records: www.atlanticrecords.com

Songs of Pain

The Daniel Johnston Movie
Reviewed by Harley Richardson

The Devil and Daniel Johnston
UK Tartan DVD TVD3600 (2006)

This documentary by Jeff Feuerzeig follows the life of American singer-songwriter and artist, Daniel Johnston. Johnston is one of my personal favourite singers. Yet in the portrait painted by this film, I can barely recognise him. What went wrong?

For starters, Feuerzeig seems to be completely unable to engage with the most important thing – Daniel Johnston's music. Instead, his film attempts to account for Johnston in terms of his mental illness. Johnston himself confirms that view. Interviewed in *Nude* magazine, he assessed the film as follows: "It's a documentary: everything's true. But it's not as entertaining as I hoped. It doesn't really talk about my music that much. It talks about all my disasters". And he's right – when it comes to evaluating his music, *The Devil and Daniel Johnston* falls flat on its face.

Feuerzeig simply doesn't understand what makes Johnston's music great. He sees it as a 'phenomenon', tracing the roots of it back to the home-recorded cassettes released during the 1980s. Yet Feuerzeig can't appreciate why these works are so remarkable, and makes no distinction between this early material and Johnston's later, lesser, works. All phases of his music are more or less equally represented, perhaps out of politeness. But each song is treated as a sign of equal value. In the context of the near-universal praise lavished on his music throughout the film, the implication is that everything we hear is evidence of his songwriting 'genius'.

'Genius' is just one of the many glowing descriptions of Johnston's talent which the film doesn't bother backing up. Perhaps the director hopes it will be self-evident from the music. It isn't. Johnston's most beautiful recording, 'Some Things Last a Long Time' (which was co-written by Jad Fair), is used as a recurring theme, and there's a staggeringly heartfelt performance of 'Don't Play Cards with Satan'. But otherwise, much of the music in the film is, frankly, pretty ropey; and newcomers to his work are likely to be left wondering what the fuss is about. The mismatch between the bold claims for his talent and the musical evidence starts during the opening credits. As he walks on stage at a Los Angeles gig in 2001, he's introduced as "the best singer-songwriter alive today…" only to launch into an indifferent rendition of an indifferent song.

The hyperbole becomes absurd towards the end of the film when a

member of Johnston's band claims that 'Daniel Johnston is far more brilliant [sic] than Brian Wilson…', a claim which just doesn't hold any water. In fact it just points up the gulf between their talents. Wilson, at his height, was a highly trained musician with a strong understanding of the principles of music and a sophisticated sense of harmony; an expert in the studio; an accomplished conductor of musicians; and above all, a person who was able to marshal all the above skills when channelling his imagination into his music. Johnston is none of those things.

Since the film doesn't have a narrator, it's up to the various interviewees to make the case for Johnston's music. But whilst their enthusiasm is palpably genuine, not one of them attempts to articulate what makes his music special (or is given the chance to do so on camera). What most of them *do* say is that their first exposure to his music was a revelation – we just don't find out why.

Insofar as the film makes any attempt to analyse his music, it just follows the usual lazy tack of pointing out that he was obsessed with the Beatles, as if that explains everything. Oasis were obsessed by the Beatles too, but that knowledge doesn't get us very far. In fact the Beatles influence is surprisingly hard to pin down, considering the press it gets.

All of these points illustrate Feuerzeig's complete failure to appraise the music of Johnston in any meaningful way. His failure seriously compromises this aspect of the film. So what does he make of Johnston's mental illness?

Johnston infamously suffers from bipolar disease, a condition that Johnston has made a feature of his lyrics. The film takes pains to show us its unromantic reality, drawing out its impact upon himself, his family, his friends, and his managers, with a minimum of prurience. His parents in particular come out of the film with a lot of dignity. That the seriousness of his illness can easily be underestimated (especially in the context of the arts where 'madness' is often casually equated with talent) is dramatically illustrated by a short sequence which records his trip to stay with Sonic Youth in the late 1980s. Over several days it slowly dawns on the band that the quirky fellow in their charge is in fact unstable and potentially dangerous.

In this way, the film follows in the footsteps of several recent popular films about dysfunctional artistes, *Beautiful Dreamer* (about Brian Wilson), (Robert) *Crumb* and *American Splendor* (Harvey Pekar), but it outdoes them all in terms of the sheer pain and suffering involved, encompassing depression, delusions, lengthy spells in mental asylums, misdiagnosed psychiatric drugs, acid trip psychosis, physical attacks on friends and loved ones, a deliberate plane crash almost resulting in the death of Johnston's father, and throughout it all, his battles with the titular Devil in his head.

.For some, the nature of Johnston's illness would place him beyond criticism, but Feuerzeig at least gives us a rounded picture of his character, warts and all. His many likeable personality traits come across clearly, but the film also reveals him to be, at least in his early and relatively stable years, an ambitious and determined opportunist who had strong ideas about how to leapfrog his way to the 'top'. It also downplays his much trumpeted obsession with his unrequited love Laurie Allen, suggesting that he got over his heartbreak a long time ago, and yet continued to use her as the basis of his lyrics, knowing the value of a good story.

All these examples point to the same problem: this film attempts to demystify Johnston's mental illness, yet it has no alternative conception of

his talent to offer. At every turn it reinforces the notion that what is important and interesting about Daniel Johnston is his life, not his music. In saying this, the film does him a huge disservice.

What is it that makes Daniel Johnston worth paying attention to? I offer a few thoughts as evidence, from my personal viewpoint:

- *Songs of Pain*, recorded 1980-1981 and recently reissued on CD. The best of his cassette releases, it demonstrates Daniel's great ability to take his painful personal experiences and distill them into something entertaining, uplifting, funny, and universal.

- His lyrics: at best, direct and unadorned. He constructed engaging situations ('I Save Cigarette Buts', 'Since I Lost My Tooth') and characters ('Wicked Will', 'Pot Head') within songs lasting just two or three minutes. His straightforward approach to language encompassed bawdy puns ('Now when Sid discovered masturbation / he just couldn't keep a good thing down'), metaphors taken for a walk: ('You wanted to be somebody / But you ain't nobody / You ain't got no body / You're just a head / Just a pot head') and a seeming never-ending stream of memorable aphorisms ("I played the game but I failed the test / If I can't be a lover then I'll be a pest"). I conclude that Johnston is essentially a traditional songwriter, albeit a naïve and eccentric one.

- His subject matter. The tensions that give his early work its enduring appeal. His teenage fascination with girls, drugs and rock'n'roll jostle for centre stage with a strongly moralistic and religious outlook ('We're the world / the wicked world / marching to hell / we know what we're doing / we're marching to hell'). His focus on his own personal problems is tempered by a strong vein of optimism and an appreciation of the good things in life: 'Though I don't like John Denver / I always will remember / those rolling hills' (Wild West Virginia). If we didn't know what we know now, it would be possible to take 'Songs of Pain' as the work of a highly talented teenager who's simply a little socially maladjusted.

- His craft: his music and songs were tightly composed, with distinctive and memorable introductions, verses, choruses, middle 8s and endings which all fitted together coherently. When I first heard *Songs of Pain* it was the hyperactive delivery, exuberance and hopskippity melodies of the Jackson 5 that leapt to mind (and not The Beatles!).

- His inner darkness. His work would grow increasingly dark as his illness took its toll, culminating in the astonishing LP *1990* (recorded that year), a gospel album recorded by Shimmy Disc's Mark Kramer, arguably the only producer with any understanding of Johnston's musical strengths and weaknesses. By this stage Johnston was a man in the grip of extreme religious paranoia, seeing Satan everywhere ('I have been in Abilene / The Devil has Texas') and communicating his terror through sparse and apocalyptic piano chords.

Now, how many of your favourite singer-songwriters can offer you all that? How Feuerzeig managed to miss all of the above unique qualities in his chosen subject is a complete mystery.

There's a final strand to the story, what we might call the 'cult of Daniel Johnston'. Here, at least, the documentary performs one helpful service, because it fills in some significant gaps in our knowledge and clarifies events that have been muddied by rumour. Johnston has obsessively recorded the events of his life – on audio or video – so there is plenty of source material for the documentary makers to draw upon. And Feuerzeig diligently does what documentary makers are meant to do - checks dates and sources; unearths birth certificates, school reports and the like; and interviews the key figures in his subject's life.

Yet he makes no attempt, I suggest, to understand the deeper meaning of Johnston's appeal. How has he gone from local eccentric to cult alternative musician, to subject of an award-winning arthouse documentary with worldwide distribution? Johnston's story has great cultural significance, because it taps into some powerful veins of thought in modern society. For starters, the myth of the child (or the mentally ill person with the 'soul of a child') as an innocent seer of truth in a world of dishonest and deluded adults.

Well, this is the myth that everyone is now paying to see. Writing in the Guardian, journalist Laura Barton observes that "central to his appeal is the idea that his illness is what makes his work pure and free of artifice" (The Guardian 21/04/06). And, as we've observed previously at The Sound Projector, it's happening at a time when several other 'outsiders' (not just musical outsiders) are being reappraised, re-packaged, and sent out into the world by the mass media, for the chattering classes to gobble up like cocktail snacks. For example: Jandek, Harry Partch, and Henry Darger are all being sanitised and dumbed-down for an audience of superficial latecomers.

Johnston has an additional selling point in that he is, in certain respects at least, a victim. Accordingly he has accrued an audience of would-be social workers lining up to patronise him. I can testify to the uncomfortable experience that is a Daniel Johnston gig: a vocal minority of the audience giving him far more praise than his performance deserves, with hysterical cries of 'We love you Daniel!' coming thick and fast. They seem more interested in making a statement about themselves than listening to Johnston's music; showing the world that they are emotionally literate, in touch with the pure soul of the troubled man on stage in front of them.

I suggest a similar experience awaits the viewer of this film. The trouble is that this 'victim' incarnation is pretty much the only version of Johnston that the film-makers will allow us to see. The central problem with *The Devil and Daniel Johnston* is that it puts *all of us* in that position; as viewers of this film, we have no choice but to adopt this patronising stance towards Daniel.

I'd like to close this essay by pointing out two serious flaws in this 'idiot-savant' myth.

Firstly: it's true, Johnston's great strength is his self-awareness and his ability to get straight to the point in a way that most songwriters would kill to do. But we should be clear that this is not a skill you'll find in many children; in fact, it's an ability that can only come with adulthood. Children may ask lots of penetrating questions, and stumble upon the occasional insight, but that does not make them wise, or good songwriters. Johnston's talent is often described as if it was simply a gift, an ability which he was born with and which he has played no active role in developing. Yet his skills were developed through dedication, hard work and many hours of practice and study, however undisciplined and eccentric a form this may have taken.

Secondly: whilst it would be foolish to ignore the role his illness has played in his music, we must also acknowledge its debilitating effect on his work. We know that Johnston's growth as a person has been tragically stunted by his illness. Inevitably, so in turn has his growth as an artist. His limited personal horizons have forced him to retread the same ground again and again with ever-diminishing returns. And without fertile subject matter, all his songwriting abilities are sadly for nought. □

The Lamenting Octopus 2006

Pioneers of Electronic Music (NEW WORLD 80644-2) is yet another compilation of music from the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, established since 1951 by **Vladimir Ussachevsky**. This stuff has been released so many times over (often on vinyl) that I'm almost starting to know the tunes by heart! The music is mostly based on tape-splicing, cold and alien electronic sounds, and manipulated feedback; the contributors include **Otto Luening, Bülent Arel, Mario Davidovsky, Alice Shields** and **Pril Smiley**. The sleevenotes work overtime to suggest to you that this American-based studio (albeit mostly swarming with ex-pat Europeans) was every bit as significant as its German and French counterparts. My favourite is Arel's crazy 'Stereo Electronic Music No 2' from 1970; the rest of it is rather too quiet and restrained for my tastes.

For some zany free improv from America, be sure to check out **Todd Whitman**'s set from the High Zero Festival in Baltimore, 2004. It's called *Zeppelins Ertse Grosse Fahrt* (RECORDED 016), and on it he's joined by **Sabir Mateen, Joe McPhee**, and **Andrea Parkins**, among others. Whitman either plays amplified metal or the baritone sax; results are some predictably routine derivatives of free jazz and noise music. For a document of the 2003 Festival, see *Patience Tryouts* (RECORDED 015), with squeaky noises and electronic music from **John Berndt, Chris Cooper, Michel Doneda, Michael Johnsen, Michael Zerang** and others playing in group combinations.

If you're into minimal 'room' music like Michael J Schumacher or anything on the Bowindo label, you should also bend an ear to **Gabriel Paiuk**'s newie, called *Res Extensa* (SEDIMENTAL sedcd043). Argentinian Paiuk mixes various field recordings to produce an enjoyable claustrophobic meditation; still seems very 'internal', even when he uses outdoor recordings.

Outward Sound Ensemble return with another strong set of pieces, *Thunder in a Clear Sky* (DISCUS 23CD), the fruit of events organised, recorded and issued by **Martin Archer**. He brought over Canadian Chris Meloche, one half of the Ensemble, and had him play live in Sheffield in 2005 with various local buddies Mick Beck, Charlie Collins and Nick Robinson. This was followed by some real-time live overdubs by Herb Bayley, the other half of the Ensemble, resulting in this 'trans-Atlantic collaboration with some of England's best improvisers'. Strong combination of Meloche's treated table-top guitar with acoustic instruments from all except Archer, who uses software to create sounds or process them. Slow, delicious, subtle and airy music results, every sound blended and polished to perfection.

VHF is the UK trio of **Simon Vincent, Graham Halliwell** and **Simon H Fell** who strut their stuff on this 2001 recording *Statics* (L'INNOMABLE NO NUMBER), only recently released on this Solvenic label. Cold and dreary 'reduced' playing, suggestive of nothing so much as a cold and sunless day in May. Executed with electronics, percussion, alto sax and bass, with each player straining hard to do less and less with each passing moment. Results are stuffy, uneventful, and tedious.

Montreal Sound Matter (POGUS P21041-2) is a compilation from an exhibition of this name held summer 2006 in Canada, under the artistic direction of **Francisco López**. Mostly comprises some reprocessed environmental recordings from **Hélène Prévost, Steve Hiembecker, Louis Dufort, Tomas Phillips, Chantal Dumas, a_dontigny**, and **Mathieu Lévesque**. Results are unengaging, dreary, and tastefully polite examples of modern electro-acoustic meanderings, and the smug sleeve notes will make you feel ill.

Chandan Narayan wrote from Michigan and sent me a fine hand-made CDR of his 'newest recording of solo autoharp' mounted on a greeting card cover. 'I don't have much in terms of a musical pedigree', he writes, ' but have a lot of ideas regarding my approach to the autoharp.' He recorded everything live during one snowy day in Ann Arbor; it's extremely quiet and scrapey metal music which is actually quite nice to listen to. 100 copies only; try emailing him at cnarayan@umich.edu.

From Paris comes *Vibrö No 3*, the Citizen Band issue, a sort of audio magazine in a box which comes out twice a year under the auspices of an international gang of artists and journalists. They would like to see it as 'a cross between an art piece and a specialised magazine'; the CD is mounted in the lid of a hinged box, containing a bunch of square printed cards. Each of these pasteboard dandies presents an intriguing photo or image, with information about a creator on the verso. Fab package, but the only music that appealed to me here was the perplexing piece by **Mark Vernon** called 'Monitoring is possible in the following ways'. Also includes contributions from **Stephen Vitiello, Joan Schuman, Zoe Irvine**, and others.

Some splendid local guitar and drums trash-noise arrived from a band with the bizarre name of **Cau-Cational Betreet**. *The Zeus Engine* is only a CDR and I've no idea if they have any proper releases yet. Unstructured, feral, amateurish racket from these roaring youths. Try emailing Leon at barnett_leon@hotmail.com.

Guillermo Gregorio is a composer and performer from Buenos Aires, and he realised the eight pieces on *Coplanar* (NEW WORLD 80639-2) with the help of musicians from Chicago and Boston, including Kyle Bruckmann, Fred Lonberg-Holm and others. Small ensemble chamber music (woodwinds, strings, etc) with some low-key electronics parping forth from Jim Baker's ARP synth. Allegedly influenced by certain movements in 20th century visual art, Gregorio's music has honesty and integrity, but not much in the way of listening interest.

Icebreaker's *Terminal Velocity* (CANTALOUPE CA21031) is a strong set of five performances by a large European Ensemble, led by James Poke, John Godfrey and Richard Craig; they play lots of wind instruments, with guitars, percussion and keyboards, sounding very much like a souped-up version of the Michael Nyman Band or the Philip Glass Ensemble. Here, they play a couple of their own compositions but also one by Gavin Bryars, one by Louis Andriessen, and one by Damian Le Gassick. Assured playing, full of precision yet also packing quite a strong punch. May be the sort of 'tasteful' thing you used to get at The South Bank, but still of interest.

Packaged inside a cut-up segment of a packing carton is a vile CDR on Chmafu Nocords Records, credited to **Massaccesi featuring chicken & monkey**. Recorded live at a venue in Graz in Austria, this is a horrifying piece of abrasive and nasty table-noise with grotesque samples and cut-ups, made even more insufferable by the smug interpolations and announcements from the performer. Euro-noise-scum at its worst!

Jon Mueller and **Jason Kahn**'s *Supershells* (FORMED RECORDS 104) is minimal low-key droney near-silent improv; too quiet and boring for me. Percussion, cassettes and analogue synths were used over these two tracks, in a concert in Milwaukee from 2005.

Rob Hart has just started the State Sanctioned CDR label in the UK, of

which the first issue is *The Sword Swallower's Grave* (SSRCD001), performed by Rob himself under his **Eaten By Children** guise. He describes it as a 'buckled, misshapen curiosity'. I was initially intrigued by this ramshackle collection of ill-fitting and rattling recordings, but ultimately it's not a very satisfying or coherent listen. It's a strange, aimless collage of unconvincing guitar and harmonium performances, alternating with home recordings of junk, glass, bottles, that sort of thing. Still, he took four years assembling this, so clearly thinks he's onto something. Some care has been taken over the package too. From www.statesanctioned.com.

Ginger Leigh is an American mystery man whose work I never quite 'get'. His new one *Sparrow Wings* is no exception; a strange mix of ill-fitting recordings, as he veers wildly from sloppy cut-up experiments to half-baked industrial guitar and drum-machine noise. Everything is taken at this full-on tilt which is exhausting to endure, and he never fails to exceed the limits of good taste. However, he carries some conviction about what he's doing, and he has his followers. From www.gingerleigh.com.

Na are a Japanese trio, not without interest, who produce extremely quirky pieces of improvised electronic and guitar music, often patterned at random with bizarre voice stylings. Their disconnected music is pretty much all over the place. *Na Is Nice* (PAX RECORDINGS PR90283) is an official CD which comes with the endorsement of Gust Burns, the president of Seattle Improvised Music, and contains ten studio tracks of endearing, delicate whimsy. Also got a couple of CDRs from a tiny low-budget label called SocketsCDR in Washington DC. *B-Sides* (SCDR007) has eight live tracks which the trio recorded in Gallery 1412 in Seattle; the thin, tinny guitar sound of Kazutaka Nomura is prevalent, as are their mildly crazy Goon-like voices. Then there's also *Radio Sessions* (SCDR008), comprising selections from their live performances on radio stations in Washington, Chicago, Seattle and elsewhere. The colourful cover scrawls suggest this trio would like to see themselves as the playful kid brother of the Boredoms, but even if they have the anarchy, they haven't got the energy. Nonetheless, good eccentric fun to be had here.

Got a couple of recent CDs by **Hat City Intuitive** both on Hat City Sounds which may be their own label. Really wish I could recommend these honking Americans unreservedly, but there's still something that doesn't gel for me, despite their obviously accomplished and spirited approach to free playing. The first one may be called *Grey Goose & a Whole Lotta Hydro* (HCI002), was recorded in Brooklyn, and has much rambling instrumental jamming in no particular mode or key, using saxes, keyboards, guitars, cheap electronics, percussion and so forth. The overall sound is promising – much clutter, energy and activity, but not enough movement, or tension. The second one is called *Narrow Miss on the Chamber Pot* (HCI001). This one likewise has plenty of half-baked jazz-esque workouts, although 'Ruematic' is more like psychedelic rock-noise, which is preferable. Cover has a spread of photographs showing something of the delightful ramshackle chaos of their performing and recording environment. They seem to be a five-piece and all adorn themselves with bizarre names, like Nix Pickler, Many Spaceships, Thoroughly Atlaffed and Jugular Plumpbob. Am I alone in thinking this 'beatnik' vibe is something they have worked hard to contrive? Guess I'll hang onto these until I make up my mind about them.

Koji Asano has released a CD of 'proper' classical music on his own label. *Violin and Viola Suites No1-No 7* (SOLSTICE 041) was performed by the duo of Kumi Nakajima and Masashi Sasaki (the latter the principal violist of the Sendai Philharmonic). Not quite as 'modernist' as you might think from this rather associative musician, this melancholy and accomplished composition has a melodic centre and its strong emotional core may stir many a cold heart. With Koji's *Rabbit Room Reservation Center* (SOLSTICE 040), we're back on familiar turf with another solo studio work in three parts; this one is built up out of faintly distorted loops of percussive noise, made into droney music through successive processings.

Damnation Road (CHOCOLATE MONK CHOCO 143) is by **Pee in my Face with Surgery**, a side project by two members of PSI, Fennelly and Welch, released on Dylan Nyoukis's label and crammed into a grungy photocopied sleeve. I found it completely repellent; uneven mixtures of harsh electronic noise and vomiting vocals. Clearly they're trying to irritate listeners, but so what? This retrograde step represents the unacceptable face of PSI!

Another total headscratcher from Nicolas Malevitsis in Athens, here with his friend Panagiotis Spoulos performing as **Old Fashioned Donkeys**. On *The Endless Battle Against Dr Curl* (PHASE!RECORDS PHR-15 / EDITIONS_ZERO#8), they serve up some of the most queasy, twisted and barbaric hyper-processed computer and tape noise you could hope for. There's also a small booklet included telling a weird science-fiction story illustrated with the adventures of said Dr. Curl, and his invention the 'Electro-Cock', with drawings of erect penises on every other page. Sonically, it's kind of hard to comes to terms with this formless, sick stuff glorping out of their speakers, but it has an endearing craziness – like porridge laced with cyanide.

Relay's *Signals* (LUCKY KITCHEN LK026) is a record full of tedious half-baked percussion (by Tim Daisy) and dribbling analogue electronics (by Ernst Karel), creating a badly-recorded pile of avant-gunk guaranteed to put you to sleep in seconds. Recorded in Chicago in 2003 with the help of the composer Jason Ajemian. Another Lucky Kitchen 'Sparkling Composers' release, which actually sparkles like 3-month old tonic water.

Psychonautilus appears to be one Thomas Tichai, an eccentric musical fruitcake from Germany, arriving here with a homemade CD called *72 Fluorescent Droppings of a Baboon Headed Morsel* which I think he recorded in Liverpool in 2005. These five bizarre examples of warped avant electro-pop with drum machines and guitars are mildly diverting, while the histrionic tone throughout (mainly down to the brittle vocals) contribute to the overall sense of alarm and paranoia.

From Canada come the band **Tetrix**, with an utterly puzzling release simply called *7*, wherein they lay out a collection of strange fractured rock music with cracked electronics and layers of impenetrable vocalising. They conceal much through various distancing methods, like distortion, overlapping vocals, eccentric recording techniques, and their chameleon-like style-swapping moves. Real looking-glass stuff. One Tetrix member sent me an encouraging email suggesting that their brand of art-rock didn't go down very well in their home city of Calgary ('We are based out of a city that is not known for its arts scene, so it makes us very happy to see that our disc has been played somewhere like London where people know their music! Around here, we've been called "worse than terrible", "heinous and atrocious" and "pure suck" in the local papers!') but they remain undeterred. In places, this reminded me of the best work of that overlooked late-1970s art band The Homosexuals; at worst, they can be infuriatingly obscure. Nonetheless, I'd recommend this one; couple of years ago, we were sent an earlier release called *Odin Audio Music Entertainment*, which was boxed to look like a Nintendo game. How wacky can you get? I may be revisiting that one in due course.

Venturing even further out on the lunatic fringe, there's this record by **Geese** called *Disclaimer*, another home-made CDR containing a single 40-minute escapade in sound. All we know is it was 'Recorded in Leeds in 2012', and there's a website www.geese.org.uk which doesn't exactly explain very much...music turns out to be a fairly diverting piece of beat-based electronica with some slightly idiosyncratic samples and a very endearing clunky approach. This sounds like young Northern Englishmen attempting to

recreate 1970s German electronica (Cluster or Kraftwerk) in their bedroom by way of *John Craven's Newsround*, and having a great time doing so.

Jeph Jerman sent his 'stones' CDR *Lithiary* (reviewed elsewhere) and another one recorded with **Tim Barnes** in 2004, at New York and Montague. Much as I love to support Jerman's near-silent antics, this one tries the patience enormously as there's virtually nothing to listen to over 30 minutes! Arrives in a plain white card cover with some soot smeared lightly on the front. Could be a document of some strange and unfathomable stick-creaking ceremony taking place on stage. About as marginal as it gets. No title, no cover art, no label, no number.

Five CDs from the Emoo Records label in New Jersey are all full of repugnant sonic gibberish of one kind of another. **Bakon**'s *Days Are Built / Dead Against* (EMR003) is 13 songs and poems delivered in a horrible affected drawl against various disjointed instrumental backdrops, each one trying to out-repel the last with their filthy, scuzzy, misogynistic lyrics and unlistenable sound qualities. Bakon is **Gerald P Castro** with some help from **Draven**. Much as I hate this juvenile drivel, I have to admit it has some very extreme 'fuck-you' qualities and a total determination not to capitulate to any notions of good taste. **Derivitive** is the same duo Castro and Draven again, this time joined by **Truck 1:9**, for *Salad* (EMR001). Their interest in 'noise, loose turntablism, lower-case hip hop and spoken shout-speak' is again in evidence on these 11 tracks of coarseness, and even when the sonic inventiveness shows promise, you'll need a strong constitution to endure the endless self-centred ranting of Mr Castro, who is clearly trying to get up the noses of feminists everywhere with his idiotic sexist spew. There is also **Bakon**'s *Sucka!* (EMR005), **Bakon**'s *Song of the Suburban Cube-Watcher* (EMR004), and **Draven**'s solo record *Pop/Deathcore Experiments Vol 1* (EMR002). This latter release suggests that Draven contributes the inventive turntablism to the Bakon mix; 16 tracks of incredibly queasy, distorted record-spinning that makes even DJ Spooky seem uncluttered!

Gunter Adler has a nifty collection of crisp electro-dance pop on Felix Kubin's Gagarin Records label, which may be a mini-LP. It's called *Hallo Herr Adler, ich hab Sie im Fernsehen gesehen. Es hat mir gut gefallen* (GR 2014). All we know is 'music and texts by Jurgen Hall', and it's done with synths and drum machine and a tuneless, emotionless Germanic singing voice. One for all you 1980s diehards, this is pretty hard to resist. Arrives with strange cover photo of two girls with shaving foam and a razor.

Kitty Play Records in the US sent me a large bundle of about 14 CDRs, all containing various brands of underground music from the USA, and mostly limited to editions of about 50-100 copies. For artworks, he utilises a practical DIY solution. He takes his plain card CD covers and applies liberal gobs of lurid car spray paint (probably processing about three dozen at once), then later wraps a coloured paper sticker around the cover, printed with an illegible scrawl. Music's mostly noise, electronics, and drone, but there's some other groovy weirdness happening too in his USA-wide surveys of loner marksmen. We have, for example, **Door** (Daniel LaPorta) with *The Broken Beast's Golden Jaw*, a

fine set of obsessive pulses and harsh table noise, emerging from a basement scene in New Jersey. We got **Pilotram** who is the electric guitar droner Duane Pitre, making a split CD with **Scientific Explanation of Despair**, a duo of miserable youngsters from Washington who do very interesting sick noises together. **Scientific Explanation of Despair** also managed to make a split CD with **Dead Machines**, which apparently sold out very quickly in its limited luxury package. The regular copy I have is indeed an impressive noise, and much livelier and nastier than most Dead Machines I've heard. Then there's **King Darves** who does solo acoustic folk songs on *The Only Other* with his stentorian voice; Nick Drake he ain't, but it's charming enough. **Panicsville** is Andy Ortmann from Chicago, owner of Nihilist Records, and he makes a bizarre CD of electronic doom with **Mr California** from Load Records; quite unsettling synth instrumentals sandwiched between collages of extreme noise. **Current Amnesia** and **2673** have a split CDR called *Sunshine Disease*; **Current Amnesia** is Dave Sutton, whose off-key approach to wayward non-melodies contrasts nicely with the extreme fuzz and drone attack of **2673**, the latter another New Jersey hero. **ASPS** are a heavy duty noise band who deliver the goods across two long tracks on *Fifth Angel / Heart of Blast* CDR; relentless feedback, crackling, howling and pounding roarage, sometimes alleviated by buzzing drones. **Aids Wolf** are from Montreal, and apparently are garnering much media interest and attention; their *Live Deth* is a six-track demo lasting some 16 minutes, and while its spiky vocals and harsh guitar work are much to be admired, I don't hear much more than a fifth-rate Sonic Youth imitation band here. **Cherry Point** and **2673** have a split CD, one track each; **Cherry Point** is Phil Blankenship from California, and is one half of LHD with John Wiese. His 20-minute episode of aggressive table noise is simply vicious, and it's backed with 15 minutes of intense deep electronic droning by **2673**. Another fascinating one is the **Jessica Rylan** split with 2673. Rylan uses custom-built synthesisers and performs seven quiet, but extremely interesting, tracks of buzz, crackle and hum, all extremely abstract and hard to figure out. That's almost the whole bunch, although there's also a *Panda Sampler* CDR which I think is meant for promotional purposes only, with tracks by **John Wiese, Bastard Noise, Vegas Martyrs, Prurient, The Chinese Stars, Aids Wolf, Aaron Dilloway** and more. Phew! Some real nice things are going on here, even if it did all seem to be a morass of undifferentiated noise yawp on first arrival. See www.kittyplayrecords.com.

Mikronytes are a curious NYC duo who seem to have found the missing link between wild electronic music and chess, if their cover art is anything to go by. John Coursey and Derek Morton deliver five brooding tracks of squelchy barks, deep buzzy drones and snake-like hissing noise surfaces on their *Sess-Supastreng* CD (KAVEKAVITY KK001), an abstracted noise-fest of exciting effects which will give Mego fans something to think about.

Alfredo Costa Monteiro takes a break from his trio work with Fages and Barberán to get together a solo release *Stylt* (ABSURD #52), which is executed simply by manhandling the stylus on a turntable, possibly reprocessing the results live using a mixing desk. Recorded in Lisbon by friend Manuel Mota, this is another strong example of Monteiro's severe, reductive approach to sonic exploration and improvised noise-drone, which verges on futility. Fittingly, it's in a monochrome black and grey sleeve.

Also taking a break from trio work is **Noriaki Watanabe**, who's the keyboard and computer whiz from **Na**. SocketsCDR have allowed him the luxury of a two-disc set of his computer music (SCDR020), including some studio and live recordings from Seattle and NYC. Although it's nice to hear what he does outside of the chaotic context of Na, it's not particularly interesting either – just lots of sample-based iBook doodling and chatter, which despite its lush surface has very little substance to it. The live tracks have added advantage of Brent Arnold's cello, but you're hard-pressed to discern much interaction of value between the pair in these random plucks and bleeps.

I continue to be amazed by the UK indie label Pickled Egg Records and the sheer quality of the material they release – I wish I felt capable to write something useful about it. There's a double-CD compilation called *Jar: A Pickled Egg Collection* (EGG50CD) which I can't recommend enough – a fantastic collection of cuts from artistes in their roster, including **Savoy Grand, Gulliver, Butchy Fuego, Le Bleu, Dragon Or Emperor, Scatter, Volcano The Bear, George, Farina, Zucanican, Big Eyes, Oddfellows Casino, Bablicon, Hassle Hound** and lots more. It's all slightly wacky entertaining art-indie-rock of the first water, often extremely lively and full of invigorating promise. Most cuts on this comp have been previously issued, but this will send you scuttling off to browse the back catalogue with fervour and passion.

Another **Mark Vernon** sound art project, which

should be of interest to any who follow his work in Vernon and Burns, Hassle Hound and Boy Band Tax Returns, is *Notes on a Re-Run* (MEAGRE SOUNDS MERE 022). This is 18 short environmental compositions based on tapes and sounds captured from around an arts space in Brussels, which happens to be situated near a railway station. You can guess what sort of bustling results he captured with his probing microphone! The final pieces were exhibited as part of an exhibition organised by Komplot.

Lambs Gamble features George Cremaschi with Fritz Welch, the latter from PSI; their *Memory Collapse* (EVOLVING EAR #EE16) is 16 tracks of cluttery, sawing and parping improv music, dressed up with playful absurdist titles like 'Infantile Amnesia followed by Snack'. Recorded in NYC.

Fred Lonberg-Holm is a fantastic Chicago improviser who plays the cello. On *Bridges Freeze Before Roads* (LONGBOX RECORDINGS LBT036), he's joined by Guillermo Gregorio on clarinet, Glenn Kotche on percussion and Jason Roebke on bass for a fabulous set of recordings from 2001, every moment just drenched in urban melancholy and icy mystery. Fans of Eric Dolphy, who often pitted his mournful clarinet against sparse instrumental backdrops, should lap this beauty up instantly.

V/Vm's latest sleazy outpouring *sabam* (NO NUMBER CD) is an unimaginative collection of Belgian beat dance records from the late 1980s, overlaid with the moaning and breathy sounds of sex performers. Tedious tosh; it's instantly become the very thing it's attempting to satirise.

Almost every record made by **Climax Golden Twins** is called *Climax Golden Twins*, and the one on European electronica label Testing Ground (TEST019) is no exception. A mini CD with a tasteful five-minute guitar instrumental, followed by a strangely unobtrusive computer experiment with humming tones, which eventually explodes into a riot of diverse noises. Nice little oddity.

Leoslayer is I think one of many aliases for **Silver Bullet / Sir Charles Bascomb**, the main man behind the Bongoleeros who are among the UK's prime underground absurdists of lively retard-rock. On his self-released *Newtoy* (NO NUMBER CDR), he realises some fantastic space rock sounds, probably using synths, and pitches everything at a lumberingly slow pace that makes most Stoner Rock seem hyperactive. If only this chiller of a record had more bottom end, it would wipe the floor with Boris and Sunn O))). From www.flatearth.free-online.co.uk/leoslayer.htm.

New World Records have also issued a three-CD tribute to the neglected music of **Julius Eastman**. *Unjust Malaise* (NEW WORLD 80638-2) collects seven long works composed between 1973 and 1981 by this gay Afro-American composer. Although a well-known and well-connected figure in New York music circles at the time, wider success seemed to elude him. Also a singer, he sang a baritone part in a Peter Maxwell Davies opera and performs his Joan of Arc composition solo for 11 minutes here. I like the defiant militant attitude which crops up in titles like 'Gay Guerilla', 'Evil Nigger' and 1980's 'Crazy Nigger', all of which were composed for four pianos, but I can't hear any corresponding force in his plodding, sterile, academic music. He also copped a lot of ideas from Glass and Reich, but not in a very interesting way. Three CDs of this may be over-doing it somehow.

Beautiful modern 'mood music' by **Water Sports** on their CDR *A Very Weihnachten* (BREAKING WORLD RECORDS NO NUMBER), combining the mystery 'underwater' moog of Russ Waterhouse with the melodic piano riffs of Lea Cho. A bit like watching an amazing unseen episode of 'Marine Boy' from a vast distance on a super TV screen. I can't think of the beautiful dreams this 17-minute wonder would give you if it was used as a nightcap. Mounted in a gorgeous handmade folded art paper cover. A most gentle and compassionate recording. See also White Tapes cassettes, noted below.

Numerous fine releases of electronic-rich improvised music continue to abound from **Günter Müller**'s FOR 4 EARS label in Switzerland. *wireless_within* (FOR4EARS CD 1655) is the team of **Voice Crack** with **Müller** and **Philip Samartzis** generating some characteristically fizzing electronic noises and gently ringing drones, suggestive of alien insects gathering. *Tanker* (FOR4EARS CD 1759) features the alto sax of **Masahiko Okura** and the voice of **Ami Yoshida**, once again joined by Müller with his ipod and electronics kit.; the long track, 'Sibuya', was recorded in Tokyo and boasts very subtle mutations and dynamics over 26 minutes. However, Yoshida's muscular voice gets a bit lost in the slowly-oozing murk. **Norbert Möslang** has *burst_log* (FOR4EARS CD 1761), a solo CD wherein he reprocesses a prior release on same label called *lat_nc*; to my mind it's quite an improvement on that languid affair, being livened up with more aggression, slightly coarser surfaces and even some avant-techno rhythms in places. On *wild_suzuki* (FOR4EARS CD 1760), Norbert joins Müller once more to play his cracked everyday electronics with Günter's ipod set-up in a 2004 set of improvs recorded in Japan, and together they clash warm and soothing drones with slightly more agitated lite-noise.

Ludovic Guerry sent us a CD pressing of *Insect's Brain*, a work credited to the Krabatof Philharmonic Orchestra but actually created just by him in Geneva in 2004. One interesting thing about this music is that it was published online as mp3 files at krabatof.org/winter.htm. Produced mainly out of noises modified or created by a computer, with some additional field recordings and other unknown sounds mixed in, it's a dark work fit to disturb your mind with its quasi-nightmarish non-structure and general air of foreboding. It yields suggestions of grim or hideous images, involving torture with needles, death by freezing, lonely dogs, empty vistas...fine stuff! A quick session spent with your browser and broadband capability should secure a personal copy for home use.

This year saw numerous bizarre and erratic releases from UK mystery man **John Cake**, in the shape of odd field recordings, obscure recits, and unpleasant electronic noise, all released as CDRs on his own Studio 45 label. He started off with the *Four Set EP* (S45JCEP1), which conveys the ennui of a day spent at home with a poor plumbing system (running taps and pipes creaking loudly). The creator then immediately killed off his alter ego John Cake, only to resurrect him as **Jean Gateau** on the *(W)retched-V/Twin-Set EP* (S45JGEP1). This monster features long tracks of insufferable electronic groaning overlaid with an equally insufferable shaggy-dog story delivered in a whiney voice, and two other tracks of violent abstracted noise depicting 'The actual death of John Cake'. Plus you have the four-second 'hurricane kyran' loops repeated ad infinitum. There's a symmetrical structure to the sequencing of this one that suggests some attempt to weave a narrative, but it's also very suggestive of computer software going wrong. Next comes *Channel 333* (S45JCJG1), a horrifying 3"-CD with two tracks timed at precisely 3:33, and featuring a chant designed to invoke the devil; this is backed up by a ghastly demon-summoning story in the wraparound cover which unfolds into a crucifix image complete with repeated images of bloodied hands. Very Gilbert and George! If you want any more of this material, there's also **Kes** *Secret Codes* (S45JGK1) which is something to do with morse codes and espionage, and a set of three CDs mounted in a little plastic box which includes 'cakemix' and 'the final 637'. I haven't managed to endure any one of these all the way through; they make me feel physically unwell. The rigour of the underlying 'concept', somewhat redolent of early 1970s concept art in the UK, is something which piques my curiosity, though I confess I can't make much sense out of it. From iain.fraser57@ntlworld.com.

Laura Andel is a composer from Buenos Aires; her *In::tension::* (ROSSBIN RS022) with the Electric Percussive Orchestra is intended to invoke the journeys of a nomadic spirit across psychic zones and other areas of the unknown. There are one or two moments where she does indeed create a spooked, ambiguous atmosphere, but a lot of her music is angular, disjointed, and hard to listen to. Three electric guitars and a theremin is overdoing it somewhat, to say nothing of the relentlessly clattering percussion section. Recorded in NYC in 2004, with the help of Elliott Sharp.

The Octopus' first prize for unusual presentation this ish goes to *Condenser* (ABSURD #53), a 17-minute CDR mounted on top of a vinyl single! The music is by **Dieb13** with his turntables, **erikm** with his samplers, and **Tomas Korber** with his electronics. The vinyl part has no hole in the middle (if it does, I'd have to peel off the label to listen to it, thus ruining the nice printed image of a robot), but the CDR contains many reliable moments of angsty, edgy static and doom-laden loop-rhythms. A nice live recording from 2004 and pressed in an edition of only 99 copies!

Mind you, another release equally bizarre in its packaging is *La razon de la sinrazon* (TESTING

GROUND TEST018), an electro-acoustic work which may have been realised by **Julio Sanz Vazquez** and may also have something to do with a reinterpretation of *Don Quixote* by Cervantes. The sound is an intriguing mix of spoken word recits with sound effects, percussion backdrops, and clever cross-fades and overlaps by the cartload, but it's the elaborate package that's the star here. A triple-gatefold card sleeve has a piece of laminated hardboard for a cover, while inside there's a printed booklet containing all the texts of this drama, and an additional tipped-in fold-out piece of cloth, printed with four photographic images. The whole package is tied up with black ribbon. I wish we had time and space to photograph this artefact in all its glory!

Equally elaborate is the package surrounding **The Hafler Trio**'s *Seven Hours Sleep* (KORM PLASTICS NO NUMBER), which is a CD housed in an outsize card wallet covered with a tracing-paper wrapper. Inside is a hefty pamphlet printed on heavy paper, also wrapped in tracing-paper, and a mini-poster foldout. And the CD, of course. The booklet contains impenetrable texts which explain absolutely nothing about this blank, opaque release. The recording was originally issued in Belgium on L.A.Y.L.A.H. In 1985, and listening to its disembodied, random sounds simply conveys feelings of alienation, queasiness, doubt, vagueness, impatience, weariness and futility. I've never really understood The Hafler Trio, but I suppose their cult status is assured as long as reissues like this keep leaking out.

The *Uncle Jim's Superstars of Greenwich Meantime* CD (ABDUCTION ABDT036) was originally released as a limited LP on Black Velvet Fuckere in 2005, enjoying the dubious honour of being cited as 001 on that label. It's Sun City Girls with guests Porest, Liz Allbee, Specs One and Andrew McGinnis, recorded with help of Scott Colburn. Alan Bishop of the Girls is here under his Alvarius B alias. Result is a vile LP full of sleazy, sarcastic lounge-bar music and dominated by the vocals of 'Uncle Jim' who sounds uncannily like Charles Gocher in surreal, foul-mouthed ranting mode. Tedious to endure these windy, wordy eruptions, and it feels as though all the musicians involved are just slumming it for an afternoon of lazy pranksterism.

Spectre Flux is effectively **Watersports** (Russ Waterhouse and Lea Cho) with **Pete Nolan**. Their *Agoue* CDR (WFOT 10) is another example of the sort of one-off ad-hoc spontaneous jam session that's so rife just now within the US underground. A most enjoyable 25 minutes of vaguely trundling, grey and fractured electronic and percussion sounds is the fruit of this union, and the listening experience it provides is like watching the laundry dry on a washing line outside 25 miles away while listening to a tumble dryer in a neighbouring state. An insert announces WFOT's publishing schedule for Spring 2006, which includes releases by **Hototogisu, Warmer Milks**, and **Violent Students**.

Crossbred have released a striking episode of sampling, electronics, voices and tape effects, with the confrontational title of *Take off your fuckin' vanity* (APOP RECORDS 018). The 3-inch CD comes mounted in a little plastic jar meant to resemble a petri dish, with some coloured resin poured in the bottom meant to look like fake bacilli! Lots of musicians want to see their work as a 'virus', but this 3-D statement makes this amibition about as explicit as possible. The 20-minute tapework hereon doesn't lack for dynamics, and after a very exciting chaotic start it drives headlong up the road of abrasive noise, echo, and repeat effects, before settling down into a troubled, nightmare drone. The duo responsible appear to be known as MAYUKo and Rie Lambdoll. A fine specimen!

Here's a few vinyl seven-inchers from the box, mostly limited pressings...**Shift** and **Institut** have a split 45rpm on Animus Productions (ANIMUS02) – both producing a reliably grim noise. The side by Institut uses menacing sampled voices, whereas Shift just go for plain old pounding and screeching. Also got a couple of groovy 45s featuring **Felix Kubin**; on *Waschzwangmama* b/w *There is a Garden* (A-MUSIK A30), he's joined by **Coolhaven** to produce two three-minute masterpieces of clinical, modern electro pop-beat melodic songs, housed in a sumptuous psychedelic flowery sleeve. On *TerriTerrorTorium* (GAGARIN RECORDS GR2016), he collaborates with **Wojt3k Kucharczyk** to exhibit three excerpts from a radio play of this name. Strange disjointed voices bark out their recits tonelessly over some tasty electronic minimal-beats. If it's real 'art' electro-minimalism you want however, then look no further than the six-track EP by **Dü**, whose lengthy title begins *Transformation 19 Mal Einfach Hergestellter...* (SONIG 23). Dü is the duo of the very wonderful **f.x. randomiz** and **jan st werner**, with some early-ish recordings from 1997-2002, and it's fantastic stripped-down buzzes, bleeps and whirrs. Alien electronic music start to finish, yet still filled with a strange warmth.

Also available are a whole bunch of limited 7-inchers on the Cologne-based tonschacht label, every one of which is housed in the usual generic black sleeve with paper insert and inner sleeve. Each is a weighty physical object – the production department clearly believes that thick pressings make for a finer disco-biscuit every time! Of interest in this series: Norway's **Jazzkammer**, whose *Knitter* (TONSCHACHT 013) is two tracks of cut-up and spliced noisy music to produce feelings of confusion and disjointedness for six minutes. **Keith Fullerton Whitman** (TONSCHACHT 012) presents a couple of six-minute edited excerpts from a live performance of mysterious, minimal treated guitar; his beautiful release is one of the quieter ones in this set. **Oren Ambarchi** dug up some 2001 recordings from his Jerker Productions studio in Sydney, and his eight-minute EP *Der Kleine Konig* (TONSCHACHT 011) contains some deliciously unfathomable guitar and effect solos from that period. *Gather/scatter* by **Greg Davis** (TONSCHACHT 017) is boring electronic random bleeps. **Dropp Ensemble** manage a nice piece of ensemble droning on *ingen tid* (TONSCHACHT 020); hard to believe that it took seven Chicago musicians to produce this simple sound. **Anla Courtis** surfaces with some 2003 recordings on *tribute to calcium* (TONSCHACHT 019), a two-part heavy droner made with overdubs of electric guitar, violin and tuba.

In the cassette tape department, we have three real gems from White Tapes in NYC: there's a split tape of endless synth droning and home-made tape noise with **AM Salad** and **The SB**, and a **Water Sports** tape called *Night Life* which will transport you with its subdued, swollen electronic tones. Both feature the influence and music of Russ Waterhouse. He's also released on cassette a collection of 1993 tapes by **Alvars Orkester**, which to my mind is every bit as good as the recent CD release on Ash International. Also from the US, we have a tape by **Pilotram** called *A Circle and the Sound that Fills it*, possibly released on Kitty Play Records. Despite the interesting algebraic formulae used to describe these works, sadly Duane Pitre's processed guitar work doesn't hit the mark on this ineffectual and quiet recording. Lastly, from the UK we have the first release on the Hearing Aid label, which is a split cassette by **Stuckometer** and **Milk Teeth**. Stuckometer are from Manchester and feature the 'legendary' Joincey, who used to play with Phil Todd in Inca Eyeball and A Warm Palindrome, plus three other Mancunians, and they make a splendid unruly free noise music using guitar, bass and drums in ways that men should not. Milk Teeth is a duo comprised of one member of Stuckometer and a member of Smear Campaign, who according to the enclosed letter 'play noise garage drums in a basement'. This fine example of home-made DIY racket arrives as a spray-painted cassette inside a denim pouch with a photocopy insert coloured with Crayola wax crayons. What more could an octopus want! Just my normal mailbox delivery, readers...and how was YOUR week? (EP)

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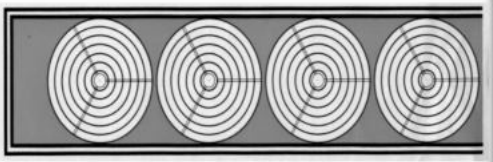

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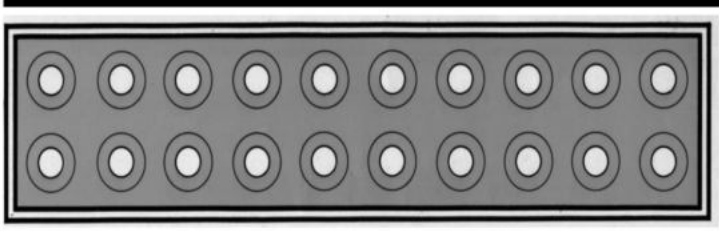

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